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**Relations between Britain and Kuwait, 1957-1963**

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**Submitted for the degree of PhD in Politics and  
International Relations**

**at the University of Warwick**

**May 1996**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the help and support of various individuals and research bodies that have helped me in my research. First I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council, whose scholarship award enabled me to meet the costs of this endeavour. They also helped provide a financial award for a scholarly trip to the United States which was important to the research of the thesis. I would like to thank the many staff who were particularly helpful in the research at the Public Records Office at Kew, the Modern Records Centre and the University Library at Warwick, the British Library, the Library of Congress, the State Department Archives, the Eisenhower Library and the Kennedy Library.

I have been fortunate to have had a great deal of support from friends and family who have all helped in various ways over the last three years. I would like to thank my brother Gordon and my friend Stephen Calleya for their valuable help during the three years, and Lynn whose love and encouragement made the work that much easier.

Finally I would like to make a special thanks to my supervisor Dr Charles Jones for the analytical and corrective expertise that he brought to my work. This thesis would certainly not have been possible without his advice, support and faith in my abilities.

Any mistakes or errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that all the work, results and conclusions presented in this thesis was obtained by myself under the supervision of Dr Charles Jones, with the exception of those instances where the contribution of others has been acknowledged. This work has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

Richard Stables

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents whose love and support over the last twenty-six years made it all possible.

## **A NOTE ON SOURCES**

This work has been based mainly on primary sources gained from institutions in Britain and the United States. British government documents held at the Public Records Office at Kew and United States government and Presidential documents held in the State Department archives, the Eisenhower Library and the Kennedy Library were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The Federation of British Industry files and British Petroleum records were also analysed at the Modern Records Centre and the BP archives held at Warwick University. Other primary sources referred to included British government official publications, Hansard and Foreign Relations of the United States. Empirical data on trade, oil and finances was taken from the BP archives, Warwick University Library, the Public Records Office, and the State Department Archives in Washington D.C. This data was collated and then analysed for use in the thesis.

Substantial secondary literature was consulted and reviewed to build on the extensive primary sources. The focus of this literature was on Middle East politics, International Relations theory, international studies and British foreign policy. Various libraries were used to conduct this secondary literature study, and they included: the British Library, the School of Oriental and African Studies, St. Antony's Library and the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Warwick University Library, Birmingham University Library, the Library of Congress and the Middle East Institute in Washington D.C., the Kennedy Library in Boston, and the Eisenhower Library in Abilene.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Relations between Britain and Kuwait, 1957-1963**

This thesis examines Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relations between 1957-1963 using substantial archival material from Britain and the United States. The thesis has contributed to the literature of Anglo-Kuwaiti relations and to the theory of international clientelism. The theoretical model was applied to both primary and secondary source material linked to Anglo-Kuwaiti relations. This combined with a traditional diplomatic historical approach to the thesis, produced a number of conclusions and highlighted a number of themes that dominated Anglo-Kuwaiti relations.

The themes that dominated the actors in this period included the increased internationalisation of the Gulf, the importance of Kuwaiti oil and sterling deposits to Britain, Arab nationalism and the influence of Nasser, the problem of over-flying rights, strategic concerns, Cold War tensions, the decline in British power and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Another important theme explored throughout the thesis is Kuwait's emerging statehood, implemented by the al-Sabah by the joining of Kuwait to various international organisations.

Insecurity often evoked foreseeable policy responses from the client, and many actions of other states produced likely, if not always predictable, reactions of both patron and client. The model of clientelism gave substance to these decisions. In the case of the client, Kuwait, goals of internal autonomy with external security were both expected and observed. The clientelist model depicted clearly Anglo-Kuwaiti relations.

The principle argument of the thesis developed from the contention that patrons facing a decline in power in the international system use clientelism to bolster their economic position. But a reduction in asymmetry of power with the client ensures that the relationship declines. In the case of Britain and Kuwait, as British power declined, its interests in Kuwait became more economic and financial than political and strategic. In a broader context a transformation of this sort is generally to be looked for as a great power declines.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CAB:	Cabinet Minutes and Memorandum
CoS:	Chiefs of Staff
DEFE:	Defence Papers
ELAK:	Eisenhower Library, Abilene Kansas.
F.B.I.:	Federation of British Industry
FO:	Foreign Office
FRUS:	Foreign Relations of the United States
JFKL:	John F. Kennedy Library (Boston, Mass.)
JPS:	Joint Planning Staff
MRC:	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry.
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSC:	National Security Council
OPEC:	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PREM:	Prime Minister Papers
PRO:	Public Record Office, Kew, London.
SDA:	State Department Archives
T:	Treasury
WO:	War Office



# **Chapter 1: The Model, the Themes and the Case Study**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces on August 2, 1990, and the subsequent Second Gulf War focused world attention on the area of the Gulf. The survival of Kuwait as an independent state had only been salvaged by the power of the world's remaining superpower supported by a united international community through the United Nations and by a majority of the Arab League. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait represented a failure of Kuwaiti and Western security policy in the region. In July 1961 Kuwait had faced a similar threat from Iraq, but at that time British troops had been sent into the Sheikhdom forestalling any Iraqi military action.

This thesis has taken advantage of recently declassified British documents to study and analyse the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship during the period when the security of Kuwait was successfully defended. The detailed period chosen extends from the beginning of Macmillan's term of office in January 1957 to Kuwait's acceptance into the United Nations in 1963. The study will help to remedy two weaknesses in the academic literature: the first in Anglo-Kuwaiti relations and the second in the theory of international patron-client relations.

It is the contention of the thesis that Anglo-Kuwaiti relations in this period illustrate the fundamental shift in British preoccupations from security to economic interests in the Middle East. The most important security objective of the British government was the protection of Gulf oil for Western consumption at reasonable prices. The political framework for the protection of this resource was the patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait. The military framework was the two British military bases located at Bahrain and Sharjah supported by bases at Aden and Kenya.

British policy in the northern Gulf foreshadowed American policy in the region. The major objective of the United States in the Gulf during the 1980s and 1990s was the same as that of Britain in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Ever since the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, the security of oil supplies in the Gulf had become the most important national security interest [of the United States] outside of containing Soviet expansion in Europe. To protect this vital interest, massive military resources had been directed towards the formation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force in 1980, which later became the Central Command in 1983.<sup>1</sup>**

There is, therefore, a closer analogy between the British position in the 1950s and 60s and that of the United States more recently than is commonly to be found, and the thesis, though primarily concerned to contribute to modern international history and international relations theory, can therefore claim some policy relevance.

The literature on Anglo-Kuwaiti relations is of limited extent, and generally lacks theoretical sophistication. Despite these limitations there are some excellent works, most notably those of Richard Schofield and David Finnie.<sup>2</sup> Both these authors used British public records, and adopted the traditional methodology of the diplomatic historian. This thesis has built on the foundations provided by such investigations while attempting to add a more theoretical dimension to the analysis of events as suggested by the work of Mary Tétreault on Kuwaiti relations.<sup>3</sup> Of these three works none is exclusively concerned with Anglo-Kuwaiti relations though each touches on this topic. Of the studies primarily concerned with Anglo-Kuwaiti relations the most prominent is that of Mustafa Alani.<sup>4</sup> Although comprehensive, his work suffers from a lack of primary research in the British archives which is not compensated for by any distinctive

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Dannreuther, "The Gulf Conflict: A Political and Strategic Analysis", Adelphi Papers 264 (Winter 1991/92), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq: Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes (London: RIIA, 1991); Iraq-Kuwait Dispute v1. : Evolution of the Iraq-Kuwait International Boundary on Land and Sea, Pt. 1: 1830-1994 (London: Archive Edns, 1994); Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States (London: SOAS, GRC Geopolitics Series, 1994); David H. Finnie, Shifting Lines in the Sand: Kuwait's Elusive Frontier with Iraq (London: Tauris, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Tétreault, "Autonomy, Necessity and the small state: Ruling Kuwait in the Twentieth Century", International Organisation 45 (Autumn 1991), 565-591.

<sup>4</sup> Mustafa M Alani, Operation Vantage, British Military intervention in Kuwait 1961 (Surbiton: LAAM, 1990).

theoretical framework. Its general conclusions are unsound and will be contested in this dissertation.

Other writers have touched on British relations with Kuwait as part of some more general survey.<sup>5</sup> Arguing from a dependency perspective, Jill Crystal's work on Kuwait is notable for its attention to social change in Kuwait. Less comprehensive as Crystal's work, but adopting a similar theoretical approach are the works of Lienhardt and Siddiq al-Salih.<sup>6</sup> Arguing from a realist diplomatic perspective the works of Kelly, Bulloch and Morris, and Monroe adds a great deal to the understanding of Anglo-Kuwaiti relations.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis has applied the patron-client model to Anglo-Kuwaiti relations rather than one of the other International Relations approaches, because this model best highlights the general features which form the basis of relations between small and large powers.<sup>8</sup> Although it could be argued that clientelism is a special case of dependency, it actually differs fundamentally from dependency theory and clearly fits more easily into the overall framework of realism. Clientelism differs from the dependency school fundamentally by recognising the state, rather than class, as the most important actor in the system. It also assumes that states are unitary rational actors seeking power and or security, thereby implicitly placing the balance of power rather than the world economy at the heart of its analysis. Clientelism also sees force as a major means of influence and that the issues of peace, power and security are the issues on which states most readily interact. International clientelism has been utilised because it is closely linked to neorealism. As such it can fall under the same criticism which is levelled at the realist and neorealist models. The major problem with

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<sup>5</sup> Jill Crystal, Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992); Jacob Abadi, Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East, 1947-1971: The Economic and Strategic Imperatives (Princeton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Lienhardt ed., Disorientations, a Society in Flux, Kuwait in the 1950s (Reading: Ithaca, 1993); Siddiq al-Salih et al., Oil Driven Macroeconomic Model of Kuwait (Helsinki, Finland: Wider, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> John B Kelly, Arabia, The Gulf and the West (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980); John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, Saddams War (London: Faber and Faber, 1991); Elizabeth Monroe, "Kuwait and Aden: A Contrast in British Policies", Middle East Journal 18 (1) (Winter 1964), 63-74.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Bercovitch, and Moshe Efrat, Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East: The Imbalance of Influence (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 16.

clientelism is that, because of its emphasis on international systemic factors such as power differentials and polarity a lack of analysis is given to the decision-making process. This thesis accepts these shortcomings but tries to compensate for the notoriously static quality of realist analysis by merging this abstract approach with the more traditional approach of diplomatic history.

The first part of this chapter provides a summary of the narrative and a general discussion of the thesis. The second part is devoted to a study of the middle range concerns and preoccupations of the major actors and with such secondary literature as reflect these concerns. The third part is of a more abstract nature, presenting the main argument of this thesis and explaining how it relates to patron-client theory. The fourth and final part to this chapter recognises that the ability to sustain the arguments depends on the primary material. This section therefore introduces the primary sources used in the remaining chapters and discusses the constraints imposed by them.

### **1.1.1 The structure of the thesis**

This introductory chapter is followed by five chronological chapters. The first of these, chapter two, covers the period from the start of the Macmillan government in January 1957 to the beginning of 1958. This chapter covers three areas affecting the position of Britain in the region: first, the reconfiguration of the Anglo-American alliance at Bermuda; second, the implications for British strategies East of Suez after the collapse of British power in the Eastern Mediterranean and withdrawal to the Gulf; third, the changing nature of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship after an increased dependence on Kuwaiti oil developed. The British, in this period, attempted to rectify and recover whatever they could of their position in the Middle East. The main argument of the thesis is introduced at this point: that the decline in the position of Britain led the Macmillan government from a mixture of strategic and economic concerns to basic economic interests. These economic interests were centred at this time in Iraq and Kuwait.

Chapter three covers the period January to August 1958, which saw the last throes of British strategic intervention in the Levant and the removal of its closest ally in the region, Iraq. There are four major parts to this chapter, two of which treat the concerns of political actors of the time, while the other two develop the main argument of the thesis. The formation of the UAR and the Arab Union precipitated a rise in tensions in the region. The UAR acted, first, as a vessel for Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism and a tool to be used to continue his undermining of the British position in the Middle East and, second, as a means to complete the strategic encirclement of Israel. This first part of the chapter permits discussion of two of the middle range concerns affecting the British: the rise of Arab nationalism and the Arab-Israeli question. The confused British policy over Kuwaiti adherence to the Arab Union and the subsequent revolution in Iraq in July 1958 is covered in the next two parts. These supplement the main argument of the thesis surrounding the patron-client relationship of Britain and Kuwait and the eventual privileging of oil and economics over broader strategic considerations. The final part of this chapter focuses on the short term effects of the Iraqi revolution for the British, namely, intervention in Jordan and heightened concern over the security of Kuwait. The concerns and preoccupations of the major actors developed here include the problems of the air barrier, the use of rapid deployment forces and the need for a co-ordinated Anglo-American policy.

In chapter four the principal arguments of the thesis are further developed. The period covered extends from September 1958 to May 1961. During this time it became clear that the major concern of the British in the Middle East and the Gulf was with Kuwait. This interest centred upon the free flow of Kuwaiti oil on reasonable terms, the security of investments and the economic interests of British oil companies. British interests in the Gulf as a whole were dictated by the paramount importance of Kuwait. The changing nature of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship lies at the heart of this chapter. The formation of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960, in which Kuwait was a key player, indicated the new power of the oil states of the Middle East. The formation of OPEC also demonstrated the development

of Kuwait in the international system and in its relationship with Britain. The declining position of Britain in the world and the Middle East prompted a change in the patron-client relationship. The rise of Arab nationalism and the political cost for any Middle East state of being too closely associated with Britain pushed Kuwait into seeking greater autonomy in its external relations, distancing itself from the outmoded pax-Britannica. However the nature of Kuwaiti security remained paradoxical because it was still dependent upon British protection from Iraq and the need to balance internal autonomy with external security.

The independence of Kuwait and the subsequent intervention of British troops in Kuwait, described in chapter five, provided the great test of Anglo-Kuwaiti relations and displayed the paradoxes of security in the relationship. The period covered by this chapter extends from June to December 1961. The limitation to a short period of time in this chapter enables a more detailed and wider ranging analysis of events. This analysis covers many of the concerns of the actors at the time as well as the development of the main argument. The crisis is covered from the military, diplomatic and political points of view. The strategic problems and concerns affecting the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship are discussed as too are British preoccupations with the air barrier, the strategic projection of power and the internationalisation of the Gulf. The intervention of British troops showed that the patron-client relationship was still intact, but the pursuit of membership of the Arab League and the United Nations by Kuwait exposed the desire of the Kuwaitis to replace the British military security with an indigenous political security.

The final narrative chapter covers three main developments of the period January 1962 to December 1963. The first of these was the British policy debate. The main argument was whether the economic benefits provided by Kuwait still justified protection by continued deployment of British military forces in the Gulf. In essence this was a cost-benefit analysis of the patron-client relationship that Britain had with Kuwait. The second development was the outbreak of the Yemeni war. This is analysed for its effects on Anglo-Kuwaiti relations and developments in the Gulf. The

extension of American interest and influence into Saudi Arabia and into the Yemeni conflict is discussed in this chapter, and the preoccupation of the Macmillan government with the Anglo-American alliance is further examined. The increased interest of America in the Gulf was encouraged and appreciated by the British. Indeed, an additional argument of the thesis is that the position of Britain in the Gulf was being preserved by the Anglo-American alliance. The third development was the overthrow of Qassim and the partial recognition of Kuwait by Iraq. This paved the way for the admission of Kuwait into the United Nations. These developments also changed the nature of Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relations. This final phase of the narrative section of the thesis anticipates the withdrawal of the British from the Gulf and the ending of the patron-client relationship with Kuwait.

## **1.2 The preoccupations and concerns of the actors**

A number of problems and concerns dominated and shaped the policies of the actors at this time, and these themes form the structure of this thesis. They fall into two broad categories. The first concerns the international politics of the region and the other major actors, and includes the Anglo-American alliance, the internationalisation of the Gulf, the problem of Nasser and Arab nationalism for the West, and the Arab-Israeli question. The second group relates to British policy, and can hardly be understood without a grasp of the bureaucratic structure of the policy-making machine. Political, military and economic concerns all played a part in determining British strategy in the region. Section 1.2.2 therefore provides an outline of the main ministries, departments and divisions involved in the policy-making process before sketching their chief preoccupation: the reduction and change in British power and position.

### **1.2.1 Themes relating to the international relations of the region**

The first theme in this group is the Anglo-American alliance and the increasing influence that this bilateral relationship exercised on British foreign policy. The so

called 'special relationship' and its place in British policy in the Middle East, the Gulf and towards Kuwait, is carefully examined. Substantial use is made of primary source material held in the United States. The secondary literature provides a useful context for additional analysis.<sup>9</sup> Other material relating to the 'special relationship' in the Middle East has supplemented the investigations.<sup>10</sup> A number of other secondary sources have also been drawn upon to provide a detailed analysis of the Bermuda conference and the Kennedy-Macmillan relationship.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis develops the argument that one of the primary objectives of the Macmillan government was to entangle the United States in the web of Middle East and Gulf regional politics in an effort to help insure British interests. This conforms with the position adopted by Paul Kennedy who contends that the Anglo-American alliance encouraged the British to retain commitments that were really beyond their capability.<sup>12</sup> The Suez conflict demonstrated to the British government that to be successful in the region they would have to enlist American support for their policies. The deepening relationship of America with Iran and Saudi Arabia during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations predated Nixon's 'twin pillar policy' of the 1970s. These relations also created an environment which was supportive of British

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<sup>9</sup> Harry C. Allen, Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations 1783-1952 (London: Oldham Press, 1954); William Roger Louis, Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); William Roger Louis and Hedley Bull, eds., The Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations Since 1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Christopher J. Bartlett, The Special Relationship: A Political History of Anglo-American Relations Since 1945 (London: Longman, 1992); John Baylis, Anglo-American Defence Relations 1945-1984 (London: Macmillan 1984); Alan P. Dobson, The Politics of the Anglo-American Economic Special Relationship 1940-87 (Brighton: St Martin's Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Henry L. Roberts and Paul A. Wilson, Britain and the United States: Problems in Co-operation (London: Broadwater Press, RIIA, 1953); Alistair Horne, Macmillan, 1894-1956 (London: Macmillan, 1988); Keith Kyle, Suez (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991); Donald Neff, Warriors at Suez (Battleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, 1988); William Roger Louis and Roger Owen, eds., Suez 1956, The Crisis and its Consequences (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); William Roger Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), and "The 'Special Relationship' and British Decolonization", International Affairs 61 (Summer 1985), 395-420.

<sup>11</sup> Baylis, Anglo-American Defence; David G. Nunnerly, President Kennedy and Britain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), and "The Anglo-American Alliance in the Kennedy-Macmillan Years, 1961-1963: A Case Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kent, 1971-72).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery (London: Allen Lane, 1976); The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers (London: Macmillan, 1988).



foreign policy interests in the area. The primary sources show that whenever a major policy decision was implemented by the Macmillan government in the Middle East, political and diplomatic support was first sought from the United States government.

The second theme is internationalisation of the Gulf. During this period a greater number of external actors were becoming involved in the Gulf, including the superpowers and the UAR. Also, it was at this time that the orientation of the conflicts of the Cold War moved progressively from Europe to the Middle East. This internationalisation theme had an important bearing upon British policy and Anglo-Kuwaiti relations. Developments that led to a greater focus by external global actors on the Gulf region included the Eisenhower doctrine, the Iraqi revolution, the Kuwaiti crisis and the outbreak of the Yemeni war. A number of secondary sources have helped to contextualise these developments.<sup>13</sup>

The third theme is the problem of Nasser and Arab nationalism for the West. Underlying this is the Arab-Israeli conflict and the problems incurred by the West in trying to pursue an alignment with both Israel and the Arab states. Nasser and the rise of Arab nationalism had a large bearing on most of the developments in the region during this period. His commitment to the ejection of Britain and Israel from the Middle East placed Egypt and the UAR firmly on a collision course with Britain. Following the Suez affair, the position of Britain and those of its Arab allies were under heavy strain from the attacks of the Arab nationalists. In the Gulf region, Nasser's policy towards Britain proved to be somewhat ambiguous as shown by the Kuwaiti crisis in July 1961 where the UAR took the side of Britain against Iraq.

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<sup>13</sup>Robin Bidwell, The Two Yemens (London: Westview Press, 1983); Carl L. Brown, International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game (London: Tauris, 1984); Dwight D. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: 1956-1961 (London: Heinemann, 1965); Galia Golan, Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War Two to Gorbachev (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Walter Laqueur, The Struggle for the Middle East: The Soviet Union and the Middle East, 1958-1968 (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969); Fais S. Abu-Jaber, "Soviet Attitude Toward Arab Revolutions: Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq and Palestine", Middle East Forum 46, 4 (1970), 41-65; Peter Mangold, Superpower Intervention in the Middle East (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, "The Arabian Peninsula and the adjacent islands" in Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, ed., The Indian Ocean: Its Political and Economic and Military Importance (New York: Praeger, 1972).

### **1.2.2 Themes relating to British political, military, and economic strategies in the region**

The fourth theme, which underlies the whole thesis, is the diminution of British power and the consequent transformation of the position of Britain in the Middle East. The decline of British power in the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean is contrasted with a clear determination by the British government to maintain a strong hold in the Gulf. The thesis demonstrates that Britain was not finished as a Middle East power after the Suez affair, but continued to play an important role in regional international politics, especially in the Gulf. This contention finds support from Keith Kyle, who wrote:

**Britain's role in the Middle East enjoyed a brief Indian summer, when British troops returned to Amman at the urgent request of King Hussein to protect his throne at the time of the Baghdad Coup of 1958.... In the Gulf British influence lasted for a further decade.<sup>14</sup>**

However, the reduction in British power shaped the foreign policy behaviour and position of the Macmillan government, leading to a greatly enhanced concern to retain the support of allies and world opinion. This was expressed in closer alignment of policies with the United States, the courting of general diplomatic support for its policies amongst Commonwealth and European states, and a far more reactive policy stance. This theme was taken up by Lord Beloff who wrote that there was a "general acceptance in the Conservative party of the fact that the dominance of the United States in world affairs could not be challenged and that the path of safety was at almost any cost to align British policy with that of the United States."<sup>15</sup> The changing nature of the patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait was also affected by this reduction in British power.

The reorientation of the British position from the eastern Mediterranean to the Gulf forms part of this fourth theme and supports the overall contention of this thesis

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<sup>14</sup>Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 560-561.

<sup>15</sup> Lord Beloff, "The Crisis and its Consequences for the British Conservative Party" in Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956*, pp. 333-334.

that oil was now the overriding interest for Britain in the region. This shift in focus from the Levant to the Gulf was forced on the Macmillan government. As Donald Maclean put it: "The shifting of the main focus of Middle Eastern policy to the Arabian peninsula was not of London's choosing, but came about as the result of the sharp decline in British influence and near paralysis of British diplomacy in the rest of the area."<sup>16</sup>

The fifth theme comprises problems of defence and strategy. The symbiotic relationship between British defence and foreign policy ensured that the aims and objectives of foreign policy shaped the strategies of defence. Contrary to the view of Sir Harold Beeley, this thesis contends that the British government still believed in its capacity for effective military action and had reason to do so.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the limitations of and problems with military power shaped foreign policy. This is clearly demonstrated throughout the thesis when force and the military enter the equation of British Middle East policies. The air barrier and the problems of the strategic projection of force hampered the British in their security efforts in the Gulf and the Levant. The conclusion that military logistics played a crucial part in the policy of Britain in the region is endorsed by Abadi and Darby.<sup>18</sup> The thesis differs from Abadi and Darby over the weighting given to the role of the balance of power in the Gulf in the success or failure of British policy. It is argued that British Gulf policies were as much reliant upon the balance of power of the three major Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq, as on British military presence. The vital role of Britain as 'balancer' and neutraliser of the Gulf region is examined at this point.

The final theme of the thesis is concerned with the importance of economics in the policy and political position of Britain in the area. Kuwait was a crucial part of

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<sup>16</sup> Donald Maclean, British Foreign Policy: The Years Since Suez 1956-1968 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), p. 179.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Harold Beeley, The 'Special Relationship': Anglo-American Relations Since 1945, ed. William Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 290.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Abadi, Britain's Withdrawal From the Middle East, 1947-1971: The Economic and Strategic Imperatives (Princeton: Kingston Press, 1982); Philip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez: 1947-1968 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

British Gulf and Middle East policy from 1957 onwards and more especially after the revolution in Iraq in July 1958. There were three reasons for this. First, Kuwait had become the largest source of oil for Britain and Western Europe. Second, British oil companies controlled an important stake in this oil production. This earned massive revenue for the British economy, bolstering the balance of payments position. Third, the al-Sabah ruling family kept a large proportion of its oil royalties in sterling. This was an important investment in the British economy and a key prop to the value of sterling. It is this theme, pursued through most of the narrative chapters, that supports the main argument of the thesis, that the major external interests of Britain, following a decline in power, had become more economic and financial than political and strategic, (and that, more broadly, a transformation of this sort is generally to be looked for as a great power declines).

A recurring feature throughout the thesis, but not an underlying theme, is the complexity of a British foreign policy process characterised by bureaucratic horse trading. Britain's goals were not as clear cut as the patron-client model might suggest. Britain had many interests in many states. The bureaucratic complexity of the British foreign policy process also did not always make for clear cut policy positions. A number of Ministries and government departments contributed to the foreign policy making process, competing, accommodating, and working together over issues, policies and agendas. The most influential of these was the Foreign Office. This Ministry, second in overall government influence, power and status only to the Treasury, represented interests bound up with the status quo. These centred on fostering and keeping 'traditional' relations with 'traditional' allies. In the Foreign Office there had been a general horror over the Suez adventure. Concern centred on the particular policy to be undertaken, but also on the reduction in its general power and position in the foreign policy decision making process that had taken place over the affair. During the Suez War the Prime Minister's office and the Treasury were more important in the policy process than the Foreign Office.

Within the Foreign Office there were a number of competing departmental interests. The Arabian, Eastern, and the Levant Departments each had differing traditions, rationales, and interests. The Eastern Department was more interested in the larger Middle East power politics and the Cold War. Its direct concerns were with Iraq, Iran, the Baghdad Pact (later becoming Central Treaty Organisation, CENTO), and economic and social development in the Middle East. The Arabian Department focused on the Gulf, and the problems of Saudi Arabia and the Sheikdoms. It was directly concerned with the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Muscat and Oman. The Levant Department was directly concerned with Egypt and Syria (later the United Arab Republic, UAR), Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and British forces in the Middle East region. The neutralisation of Nasser was a major concern for all three Departments. The differing positions of the Departments and the varying policy advice caused problems, particularly over issue relating to the Arab Union and arms to Iraq after the fall of Nuri. More generally, problems arose when issues crossed over the departments and priority had to be given either to one of the three departmental areas or to the general British Middle East position.

The Treasury was perhaps the most powerful Whitehall Department. Its interests in British policy in the Middle East were with Sterling, profits of the oil companies, reduction in government costs and therefore the limiting of commitments, and the cutting back of the power of the Services. The Treasury attitude towards the Gulf changed during this period. The opinion of the Foreign Office, initially supported by the Treasury, was that Britain's position in the area was vital to the safeguarding of oil, sterling and Britain's strategic Cold War concerns. By the beginning of the 1960s the Treasury took a more circumspect stand. The Treasury view was that British forces did not actually help the oil companies nor were they needed to keep the oil flowing. The rise of OPEC had an important bearing on this policy change. The organisation removed much of the influence that Britain had over "reasonable prices", and at the same time the peculiar investment habits of Sheikh Abdullah were beginning to change to more dollar directed diplomacy. Kuwait's overseas investment was now being

directed across the board into a wide range of foreign currencies particularly American dollars. The rationale with Sterling deposits therefore was changing.

The Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office was also a very powerful influence over foreign policy. Over certain issues and at certain times the Prime Minister's views were paramount in the policy process. The Prime Minister's main interest was the overview of Britain's position and prestige, but also the costs of maintaining this. Macmillan, Home and Wilson generally held a belief that Britain still had a major role to play on the world stage. Macmillan particularly felt that, despite Suez, Britain was still a major power in certain areas of the world and that these areas should be fostered and supported, as long as it was politically and financially prudent. As long as Britain was still wanted by the states concerned and that its position was not being undermined by the anti-colonial or anti-imperial feelings sweeping the third world, Macmillan wanted to play the world role. An indication of Macmillan's belief in Britain keeping its great power status is his attempt to mediate between Khrushchev and Kennedy. Wilson also took Britain's world position seriously. He declared publicly in November 1964 that "We are a world power and a world influence, or we are nothing."<sup>19</sup> The influence of the Prime Minister came particularly through proactive foreign policy or general policy moves. The Prime Minister needed to lead the Cabinet over military intervention or important policy decisions. The tactics and the style of implementing these policies was then a matter of compromises between the various departments and Ministries concerned.

The Minister of Defence took an increasingly important role in the shaping of foreign policy. The changes to British defence strategy had a profound impact on foreign policy. Rejection of large military bases for smaller more manoeuvrable forces was once such example. The three Services were at the same time playing a less important role as force levels were reduced. Traditionally the most powerful of these was the Navy. Its priorities centred on ensuring the need for a surface fleet and

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy (London: Fontana Press, 1981), p. 376.

maintaining as much of its traditional role in areas of the world such as the Gulf, in order to keep the rationale for a fleet. It had lost much of its power in this era, but it still had an important voice with its traditional links through the Monarchy and Parliament. The Air Force was the growing power amongst the Service Ministries. Its aim was to replace the Navy as Britain's main tool for force projection. It therefore desired a role with nuclear bombers and fighters. This service resisted as far as possible the pressure to increase its transport command as it did not want to develop into mere transport for the Army. The Army at this time was focused on the removal of conscription. With this it hoped would come the need to foster and keep as many of the traditional regiments as possible. The army was dominated by the traditional Cavalry and Infantry regiments. It was therefore not very well disposed to the new concepts of "teeth regiments" or "rapid reaction forces", but tended to hanker after large military bases. Its role in the Gulf was quite different to its role in Western Europe. The use of small units in 'fire-fighting' roles to help put down local internal problems, such as in Oman, came from the newer traditions of guerrilla warfare developed in the Second World War by David Sterling.

All these Departmental and Service interests fed into the development and implementation of British foreign policy in this period. Differences in objectives and outlook go some way to explaining British policy. Yet it can be argued that these institutional rivalries were merely symptomatic of the conflicting imperatives that governed the strategic thinking of Britain in its decline.

### **1.3 Theory and the arguments**

The theoretical framework for analysis of the main arguments and themes of the thesis is provided by the abstract model of international patron-client relations. This model helps explain the decisions taken by the two states and the constraints and goals of their respective policies towards one another. This section will be split into two parts. The first part will refer to the theory of international patron-client relations in the purely theoretical form. The second part will relate the theory to the themes and the arguments of the thesis.



### **1.3.1 International patron-client relations; the theory**

The theory of clientelism originated in studies of behaviour of peasant communities. It was then adapted to explain certain behaviour at the domestic political level.<sup>20</sup> This thesis will use the patron-client relationship at the interstate level as was first done by Christopher Shoemaker and John Spanier, to provide the conceptual framework for analysis of Anglo-Kuwaiti relations.<sup>21</sup> There are two reasons for using this analytical model. First, the patron-client theory elegantly explains the relationship between Britain and Kuwait. Second, it is an underdeveloped area of theory in international relations. A few scholars have developed and added to the analytical framework devised by Shoemaker and Spanier.<sup>22</sup> What has emerged are a number of core characteristics of interstate patron-client relationships. The first characteristic is that the relationship is dyadic and particularistic. It relates to specific relations between two actors. Second, the association is hierarchical as the patron is clearly the senior partner in an unequal relationship. Third, the association is informed by diffuse relations because, as well as being particularistic, the relationship covers a host of general areas between the two actors. Fourth, the association has, as a core characteristic, the flow and exchange of resources. Linked with this is the fifth characteristic, that the flow of resources is a reciprocal exchange. The linkage is mutually beneficial with both patron and client reviewing continuously the costs and

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<sup>20</sup>For a comprehensive coverage by political scientists of patron-client relations see: Rene Lemarchand and Keith Legg, "Political Clientelism and Development: A Preliminary Analysis", Comparative Politics 4 (January 1972), 149-178; James C. Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia", American Political Science Review 66 (March 1972), 91-114; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Rene Lemarchand, Political Clientelism, Patronage and Development (London: Sage, 1981); Steffon W. Schmidt et al., Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism (California: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>21</sup>Christopher C. Shoemaker and John Spanier, Patron-Client State Relationships: Multilateral Crisis in the Nuclear Age (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984).

<sup>22</sup>Ali Ghassemi, "United States-Iranian Relationships, 1953-1978: A Case Study of Patron-Client State Relationships" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1988); Christopher P. Carney, "International Patron-Client Relationships: A Conceptual Framework", Studies in Comparative International Development 24 (Summer 1989), 42-55; Tétreault, "Autonomy "; Lawrence G. Timpe, "British Foreign Policy Toward the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, 1954-1959" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1991); Bercovitch, Superpowers and Client States; John Ravenhill, Collective Clientelism, the Lomé Convention and North South Relations (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Thomas A. Bryson, American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East 1784-1975: A Survey (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarcrow Press, 1977), p. 234.

benefits of the relationship to ensure that this remains the case. Sixth, the association is asymmetrical in resources and power. The patron is the senior partner because of this asymmetry in power. Seventh, the relationship is one of compliance characterised by affinity and loyalty, but is voluntary.

Shoemaker and Spanier denoted four specific elements inherent in patron-client relations to distinguish it from other forms of relationships in international relations. First, clientelism is defined by asymmetry of military resources. The major motivation behind the relationship for the client is its lack of security. Writing on collective clientelism, John Ravenhill takes up a similar position to Shoemaker and Spanier. He writes: "Like all forms of clientelism, the collective variant typified by the ACP strategy in the Lomé Convention has its origins in scarcity and insecurity: the struggle of the weak to survive in an unpredictable world in which they are unable to compete on equal terms."<sup>23</sup>Clients do not have the capability of remaining militarily self-reliant; the client state's autonomy and security can only be secured through the patron-client bond. "The client cannot, by itself, become a major military power in the international community; nor can it, by itself, guarantee its own security."<sup>24</sup>Second, the bond is part of wider interstate relations because part of the motivation of the patron arises from the supporting role that the client can play in patronal competition. The client must be of great benefit to the patron and, correspondingly, represent a significant loss to other prospective patrons.<sup>25</sup>Tétreault characterises part of the patronal motivation as being "defensive cliency": "the acquisition of a client to keep it out of other hands."<sup>26</sup>Third, the perception of the relationship by other states is an important element of the patron-client relationship. It has to be clear to other actors that the patron and the client are bound tightly together. This usually occurs when the dyadic relationship continues over a lengthy period of time. Fourth, the relationship is particularised in that the

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<sup>23</sup> Ravenhill, *Collective Clientelism*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Shoemaker and Spanier, *Patron-Client*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Shoemaker and Spanier, *Patron-Client*, p. 13; Carney, "International", p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", p. 567.

interactions, far from being rigid and concrete, remain fluid and non-defined. The exception being during crisis periods when the relationship becomes defined. The patron-client relationship is therefore particularised to the event or issue at hand.<sup>27</sup>

### **1.3.1a Patron goals**

The nature of the patron-client bond ensures that there are definite limits on the relationship, particularly on the goals sought and the ways used to attain them. Shoemaker and Spanier characterise patronal goals as ideological alignment, international solidarity, and strategic advantage.<sup>28</sup> A patron may pursue one, two or all of these objectives at the same time. Also the objectives of the patron may change over time.

The ideological goals described by Shoemaker and Spanier can be represented as ideological convergence.<sup>29</sup> The patron pressures the client to mould itself in the image of the patron as a way of reinforcing patron legitimacy. This goal is especially important in an adversarial international system, such as prevailed during the Cold War, where the patron seeks to promote its system as being superior. The client is encouraged to bring its governmental and institutional systems as well as its policy orientations into closer conformity with those of the patron. The Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War placed the ideological convergence of client states high on their respective policy agendas. Conversely, the relationship that client states had with earlier great powers was not so ideologically determined, although, even during the period of the classical balance of power, ideology or system legitimacy played an important part in patronal policies. United States demands on clients to respect human rights and democracy could be juxtaposed with Britain's equally inconsistent nineteenth-century demands that its client states support the antislavery movement, free trade and freedom of the seas.

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<sup>27</sup>Shoemaker and Spanier, *Patron-Client*, p. 16; Carney, "International", p. 47.

<sup>28</sup>Shoemaker and Spanier, *Patron-Client*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>29</sup>Carney, "International", p. 49.

The second patronal goal - international solidarity - is the attempt by the patron to make the client appear to the international community to be part of its coalition. The patron attempts to make the "impression to the world that the client is a member of its bloc, or at least is not a member of an opponent bloc."<sup>30</sup> Patron-client solidarity can be achieved by treaty obligations, security pacts, signing of international agreements, voting concurrence in the United Nations on issues key to the patron, client proclamation of support for patron, and by cognitive liaison of the client and patron.

The third patronal goal of strategic advantage is the policy by the patron of seeking control of either territory or resources or both. The desire of the patron for control of these is linked with the need for military and strategic bases and the maintenance of economic advantage over its opponents. Strategic advantage for the patron could be gained by co-operation on military matters with the client. This might be extended at times to direct military presence of patron forces in the client state to guarantee security and to stop either adversarial attack or take-over.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Shoemaker and Spanier, Patron-Client, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup>Shoemaker and Spanier, Patron-Client, p. 19.

Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between the three patronal goals and the degree of control of the patron over the client. If the goal is strategic advantage then the control that the patron exerts over the client is weak. Conversely, if the patronal goal is ideological then the degree of control that the patron exerts in the patron-client relationship is high. The patronal goal of international solidarity is located midway on the spectrum of patron control over the client between ideological goals and strategic advantage.

Fig. 1.1 Relationship between patron's goal and its control over the client

Strong Patron Control		Weak Patron Control
Ideological Goals	International Solidarity	Strategic Advantage

Source: Shoemaker and Spanier, Patron-Client, p.17.

Figure 1.2 indicates the degree of control that the client has over the patron. The variable in this figure is the threat environment that the client faces. When the threat to the security of the client is low (low threat environment) the client has a strong control over the patron-client relationship. When the threat to the security of the client state is high (high threat environment) the client has a weak control over the patron-client relationship.

Fig. 1.2 Client's threat environment and its control over the relationship

Strong Client Control		Weak Client Control
Low-threat Environment		High-threat Environment

Source: Shoemaker and Spanier, Patron-Client, p.17.

Table 1.1 shows factors influencing the degree of affectivity between client and patron, affectivity being defined as the level of congeniality in the relationship. One or all four of the variables in the table might be found to influence the degree of affectivity between patron and client.

Table 1.1  
Elements Influencing Affectivity of Client and Patron

Aspect of Patron-Client relations	Low level of affectivity	High level of affectivity
1. International status	Low difference in status-politically, diplomatically	High difference in status-politically, diplomatically
2. Stability/ threat	High level of stability, low threat environment	Low level of stability, high threat environment
3. Resources and power	Approaching parity of resources and power	Wide gap in resources and power
4. Orientation of client's domestic populace toward patron	Hostile	Indifferent

John Ravenhill characterises affectivity in patron-client relationships as being the product of the "personalised 'face to face' nature of the relationship." He goes on to say that "affective ties are contrasted with the instrumental dealings of the marketplace and are perceived as giving rise to diffuse mutual obligations and to a certain element of unconditionality in the relationship."<sup>32</sup>Affectivity played an important role in the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship and policy behaviour was often influenced by the close personal relationships built up between the various Political Agents and the Political Residents with the al-Sabah ruling family.

<sup>32</sup> Ravenhill, Collective Clientelism, p. 31.

### **1.3.1b Client goals**

The patron may seek clearly defined goals with its client, but its ability to reach these goals are not so clear or straightforward. The patron-client relationship also remains fluid and undefined. Over specific issues the patron can expect a certain degree of compliance from the client. However, this will only come about if certain core objectives of the client are met. The client state has two fundamental objectives: first, the security of the state and its independence from other adversarial actors, and second, internal political autonomy. The perception of the threat to the client will influence the client's compliance with the patron. At times when the client feels particularly insecure and threatened it will become more compliant with the patron; when the perceived threat is reduced the client becomes much less compliant. Political autonomy is linked to regime and governmental legitimacy. The level of compliance that the client adopts changes the level of autonomy. The client state is in a constant battle to balance autonomy and security. A reduction in autonomy due to the need to be more compliant to the patron could cause a loss of legitimacy and support from the domestic population and, therefore, threaten regime security. The most important priority for the client is regime security and survival.

A third fundamental objective of economic growth could be added to the client goals. Clients have long term objectives that are vital to state survival and regime political autonomy. A client may also desire a greater role in its local region and also in the international system of states. The degree to which a client has to rely on the patron in achieving these aims will have a bearing on the affectivity of the relationship.

Table 1.2 relates the economic well-being of the client to its desired level of interaction with the patron. It also shows the choices that a state has when pursuing economic prosperity and political autonomy. This simple matrix is based on the

assumption that an increase in relations between the client and the patron will result in greater economic well-being, but a reduction in the political autonomy of the client.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1.2  
Economic Well-being of the Client Related  
to the Desired Level of Interaction with the Patron

STATE OF ECONOMY OF CLIENT STATE	RELATIVELY HIGH INTERACTION (more emphasis on autonomy goal)	RELATIVELY LOW INTERACTION (less emphasis on autonomy goal)
Relatively strong (less emphasis on economic well being goal)	REGULATION	MAINTENANCE
Relatively weak (more emphasis on economic well being goal)	ACCOMMODATION	REINFORCEMENT

Source: Adapted from: Michael B. Bolan and Britan W. Tomlin, "Foreign Policy in Asymmetrical Dyads: Theoretical Reformulation and Empirical Analysis, Canada-United States Relations, 1963-1972", International Studies Quarterly 28 (1984), 349-368, Figure 1.

<sup>33</sup>Michael B. Bolan and Britan W. Tomlin, "Foreign Policy in Asymmetrical Dyads: Theoretical Reformulation and Empirical Analysis, Canada-United States Relations, 1963-1972", International Studies Quarterly 28 (1984), 351.



Explaining the four different outcomes of the matrix Bolan and Tomlin wrote that:

In asymmetrical dyads, there are two categories of foreign policy objectives, one reflecting a desire for change and the other for no change. The change category predominates and can be conceived on a single continuum with *reinforcement* and *regulation* objectives as the poles, the former defined as a desire to increase relations with the superordinate country [the patron], the latter as a desire to decrease or restrict relations. An *accommodation* objective, reflecting a desire to reconcile the competing aims of increasing and restricting relations, is located somewhere along the continuum as a mixture of reinforcement and regulation. The second category, representing the absence of a desire for change, is manifested in a *maintenance* objective, reflecting a desire to preserve the status quo in relations with the superordinate country.<sup>34</sup>

This model can be adapted to incorporate state security and political autonomy. The security of the state, analysed from its threat environment, can be substituted for the health of the economy of the client state. This produces a similar outcome of choices, laid out in Table 1.3. This thesis assumes a hierarchy of interests for the client, with military security and not economic prosperity as the primary motivation.

Table 1.3  
Security of the Client Related to the Desired Level of Interaction with the Patron

STATE OF SECURITY OF CLIENT STATE	RELATIVELY HIGH INTERACTION (more emphasis on autonomy goal)	RELATIVELY LOW INTERACTION (less emphasis on autonomy goal)
Relatively strong (less emphasis on security well being goal)	REGULATION	MAINTENANCE
Relatively weak (more emphasis on security well being goal)	ACCOMMODATION	REINFORCEMENT

Source: Adapted from: Bolan and Tomlin, "Foreign Policy in Asymmetrical Dyads", figure 1.

<sup>34</sup>Bolan and Tomlin, "Foreign Policy", p. 351.

### **1.3.2 Theory, themes and the main argument**

International patron-clientcy is an ideal conceptual model for analysing the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. First, Anglo-Kuwaiti relations fit into the patron-client model. Second, the patron and client goals and problems identified by the formal model coincide at many points with the intuitively derived themes and main arguments of the thesis. The most crucial aspect of patron-client relationships for the patron is compliance. For the client it is internal autonomy. The degree to which the client complies with the patron and the extent of the client's autonomy are indicators of the success of the clientelistic relationship. This compliance has to be evaluated to see if it is predicted by the links that define patron-clientcy. Changes in the values of the key variables of the relationship are associated with the institution of, and subsequent changes in, patron-client relationships.<sup>35</sup> These are governed by the variables of threat, security, economic growth and levels of interaction. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 indicate both the interaction and the outcome of these variables on patron-client relations.

The model shapes the historical detail by acting as a heuristic aid to explanation. Although an aid to clearer comprehension it is not a fully operationalisable theory. A criticism of the model is that it simply highlights the obvious in dyadic asymmetrical relations. Yet it fulfils, to differing extents, the functions of a theory in international relations; the tasks of explanation, prediction and prescription.<sup>36</sup> The theory also addresses motivation, in a way that structural realism does not, by offering a set of policy objectives that the patron and the client may be pursuing.

As with any theory when applied to actual reality the analysis shows many disparities. For example those involved in policy-making ignore the underlying goals that motivate a patron into seeking or sustaining a client in a relationship. Clientelism is a tool of theorists, not a model for policy makers. This could be viewed as much a problem of methodological explanation as that of understanding or empathy. More

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<sup>35</sup> Carney, "International Patron-Client", p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Controversies in International Relations Theory (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 8.

realistically it is because policy decisions cannot be fed into a simple two dimensional matrix constituted by the variables of threat, economic well-being, and the level of political interaction. Also, the model does not cater sufficiently for the international political context in which such relationships occur. This tends to make analysis rigid and sterile. Additionally, transforming the patron-client model from an individual level of analysis to an inter-state level of analysis has been problematic. Bonds of affectivity are more plausible between individuals than states.

Despite these problems, this thesis shows that with a few adaptations, relations between Kuwait and Britain fit extremely well into the model of clientelism. The secretive nature of the relationship throughout most of the years from 1899-1971, which is not a characteristic of clientelism, was a policy that was in the interest of both the client and patron. The huge wealth of the client and the financial weakness of the patron in the later stages of its relationship was another aspect somewhat peculiar to British-Kuwait relations. It ensured that the value of the client to the patron was that much greater. Finally, in this case the role of Sheikh Abdullah somewhat modifies the usefulness of the model. Sheikh Abdullah was a crucial figure in the history of Kuwait and its relationship with Britain. He defined the process and extent of Kuwait's development as a state. His influence on Kuwait's financial situation, bilateral relations, internal politics and international status was overwhelming. He was a truly remarkable man and his impact on the relationship has to be acknowledged when assessing the British-Kuwaiti case study.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship is only one of a number of case studies that clearly demonstrate the usefulness of international clientelism as a heuristic device for better explanation of relations between states of unequal power. Other cases could have been used. British-Omani relations in the 1950s is one such example. Similar to the British-Kuwaiti relationship, this association developed and went through a number of stages. Initially, the British used the relationship for the goals of strategic advantage and economic control of Oman. In 1899 the British forced Sultan Faisal ibn Turki to

break off a coaling concession he had made with France.<sup>37</sup> This was a quid pro quo for British support of the ruling family. Just as the British relationship with the al-Sabah ruling family had helped to establish and maintain their position in Kuwaiti society, so in Oman the British relationship with the al-Bu Said family secured the ruling family's position. In return Oman became a British client, therefore helping to preclude French and other potential great power dominance of the region.

Between 1932 and 1954 another stage in the British-Omani patron-client relationship developed. Sultan Said ibn Taimur pursued the objective of internal autonomy. The need to remove the financial debts incurred by his father was important because it had become a control mechanism for the British government. From Table 1.2 it can be seen that Sultan Said pursued at this time an **Accommodation** objective.

The next stage of the relationship, similar to that with Britain and Kuwait, was caused by the reduction in power of the patron. The patron-client power relationship changed to the extent that the Sultan was manipulating the British rather than the other way round. He sought what could be described from Table 1.2 and 1.3 as a **Regulation** objective; a decrease and restriction of relations with the patron. His policy was based on a desire for a more independent relationship with the British government. As the British declined in power and influence in the world and in the region, their client states were able to, and indeed needed to, modify their relationships with Britain. The British at this stage had three objectives for Oman. First, to keep the RAF base at Masirah and the overflight rights. Second, to be on hand to exploit the possibility of Omani oil. Third, to have an ally astride the strategically important Straits of Hormuz. The means of attaining these objectives was by the use of the patron-client relationship. There are numerous other examples of patron-client relationships in the history of international relations. As with the British-Omani and the British-Kuwaiti case studies few of them completely fit into the model of clientelism. Some of them have characteristics not readily recognisable in the theoretical model. But, on the

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<sup>37</sup>Lawrence G. Timpe, "British Foreign Policy Toward the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, 1954-1959", p. 316.

whole they tend to show that the theory is useful for understanding international relations between dyadic asymmetrical states.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti case study showed that a declining patron put economic goals as the primary motivation with its clients. Strategic planning, which had always been a means to an end, for Britain in the 1950s and 1960s became increasingly an economic end. Clearly a patron policy dictated by economic concerns will only be successful if the patron is able to economically exploit the client. Although a somewhat peculiar type of clientelism, Britain's relations with many of its colonial powers in the 1940s and 1950s fits the pattern of patron's in decline. The colonies became increasingly important economically to Britain at this time because they could provide sources of food and raw materials that could be purchased in sterling rather than dollars. Their importance increased dramatically following the convertibility crisis of 1947. The crisis had highlighted not only the weakness of sterling against the dollar, but also the likelihood of a sharp decrease in living standards in Britain. The British government gave strong encouragement to the production of colonial commodities that could be sold for dollars. This was then used to pay for essential imports into Britain from the United States. The dollar deficit in the sterling area was chiefly financed by the equity raised from West African and Malayan exports. Bulk purchase schemes were devised for the commodities and crops produced by the colonies at considerably below world market prices. As British officials also controlled the marketing of these export crops the British government was able to control the proceeds from the sales. As John Darwin writes:

**It is at first sight a curious paradox that as Britain's power declined her economic grip on her imperial system seemed to tighten; that as her economic strength waned the old distaste for turning the empire into a trading bloc made way for the Sterling Area cooperation and discriminatory controls. Likewise it seems strange that at a period of maximum economic strain at home policy makers in London should have contemplated with greater enthusiasm than ever before the economic uplift of the tropical colonies.** <sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>John Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World (London: MacMillan, 1992), p. 140.

Similar to Britain, United States decline precipitated economic exploitation of its client states. With a blow to its power caused by the Vietnam war the United States began to economically exploit its client states. In the 1970s as the United States became more dependent on oil imports from the Gulf its policies began to mirror British 1950s and 1960s policy for the region. Taking over the role from Britain, the United States sought to prevent any encroachment by any other external or regional power on the weak Gulf Sheikhdoms. More interestingly, the United States pressured these new client states into transferring the huge equity surpluses into American banks, financial markets, and export markets. As Kubursi and Mansur write:

**It was worked out between the two partners that the excess revenue earned by Saudi Arabia would be “recycled” through America’s financial institutions and military industry. In 1971 President Richard Nixon had taken America off gold convertibility, bringing about rapid devaluation of the dollar as inflation induced by the Vietnam War further eroded the value of the American currency. In this context the new relationship between the two countries, and its pattern subsequently emulated by other major Middle East producers, principally Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, becomes significant in explaining American Middle East policy as part of the larger strategic policy of maintaining U.S. economic primacy over its industrial rivals.<sup>39</sup>**

These surplus oil revenues in the 1970s amounted to vast amounts of equity. A large amount of which went back into the American economy.

The end of the Cold War has brought increased motivation by patrons for economic exploitation. Yet few weak powers fit into the category of being financially wealthy. The exception again has been the Gulf oil states. United States relations with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been facilitated by their economic wealth. Although not a declining power in the sense of Britain or the Soviet Union, the United States has been preoccupied in the 1990s with reducing its Federal deficit. As resources have been cut so have overseas commitments, and these have been determined in the 1990s mainly by America's economic interest. American policy over Bosnia has been slow, hesitant and irresolute. In contrast, action was swift and decisive by America in

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<sup>39</sup>A. A. Kubursi and S. Mansur, "The Political Economy of Middle Eastern Oil" in Stubbs and Underhill, eds, Political Economy and the Changing Global Order (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 318.

securing Saudi Arabia in August 1990, and liberating Kuwait in January 1991 following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Importantly the Gulf War, fought over reasons of international law and oil, was substantially financed by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Since then, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have sought to cement their respective client-patron relations with the United States. Similarly to the 1970s, political and security ties for the Gulf states have been bolstered by lucrative arms deals with the American defence industry, and through heavy financial investment in Wall Street.

United States and Soviet relations with the Horn of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s provide further examples of patron-client relations. In this case the two rival patron states (United States and the Soviet Union) formed relationships with weak client states (Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia). United States support for Ethiopia in the 1960s and early 1970s was countered by Soviet support for Sudan and Somalia. Curiously in 1977, the Soviet Union switched its patronage to Ethiopia which caused the United States to switch its support to Somalia and Sudan. The patron-client model fits only partly the relations between these countries. For example bonds of loyalty and affectivity were certainly not a characteristic of these relationships. The complete changeover of client relations after 1977 demonstrates this. However, as in other clientelistic relationships, the need of Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia to form relations with outside patrons was linked with their perception of external threats. The increase in threat for the client states caused by their regional neighbours pursuing exterior power support caused a decrease in security and was countered by a policy as can be seen from Table 1.3 of **Reinforcement** with their own potential patronal ally.

As has already been argued, patrons declining in power seek economic advantage from their client states if able to. The demise of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s parallels the decline of Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. The difference being that the Soviet Union was unable to exploit, to the level that Britain could, its clients for economic advantage. For example no residual economic advantage could be gained by the Soviet Union from the impoverished area of the Horn of Africa. Therefore the Soviet Union correspondingly lost interest in securing clients in this area in the late

1980s and early 1990s.<sup>40</sup> The Soviet patron goals of alliance support and strategic advantage took second place to economic concerns. Soviet oil and Coal was sold to its client states at Western market rates and not at the previous subsidised rate.

In the area of the Horn of Africa, with the withdrawal of the Soviet Union as a player, the United States switched its patronal goals away from alliance support to the pursuit of conflict resolution, democracy and human rights. This represented a higher degree of patronal interference and therefore interaction with the internal politics of the client state. The client states of Sudan and Somalia, intent on pursuing economic well-being and therefore in need of their patron's economic support, pursued, as can be seen from Table 1.2, an **Accommodation** goal. This objective was pursued because there was a desire to reconcile the competing aims of increasing and restricting relations.

Another example of a patron-client relationship is that between the United States and the Republic of Korea. In this relationship the patron is given wide access to military bases, intelligence gathering, and other facilities. In return the client keeps autonomy in its domestic political arena. The relationship has been marked by the characteristics of clientelism in that the relations are dyadic, particularistic, diffuse, and the association is definitely hierarchical with an asymmetry in power and resources. Also there is a reciprocal exchange of resources between the two states. South Korean and United States relations are based on compliance in that they are voluntary. Due to the constantly high threat emanating from North Korea the client state of South Korea has pursued either a **Maintenance** or a **Reinforcement** objective with its patron, the United States.

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<sup>40</sup>Terrence P. Lyons, "The Horn of Africa Regional Politics: A Hobbesian World", in Wriggins, *Dynamics*, p. 184.



### **1.3.2a Anglo-Kuwaiti relations defined by the patron-client model**

Between 1899 and 1971 Britain and Kuwait demonstrated classic characteristics of international patron-client relationships. British relations with Kuwait were moulded by wider concerns and interests that included the Gulf, the Middle East and the Cold War. However, many of the issues relating to Kuwait were treated as particularistic and part of a dyadic relationship. Relations between the two were clearly hierarchical, with Britain as the senior partner or patron and Kuwait as the junior partner or the client. Issues covered in the relationship were widespread and changed over time, ranging from the security of Kuwait through oil exploration and telecommunications to consular representation. Within this relationship there was a reciprocal flow and exchange of resources. Britain had been perceived as a great power, up until Suez, that could offer political, military and diplomatic protection from other great powers to certain small states in its strategic orbit. In return for this protection Britain sought one or all of the three patronal goals from its clients: ideological convergence, international solidarity and strategic advantage.

In Kuwait, the British government sought strategic advantage, which it gained by acquiring responsibility for Kuwait's external relations. Britain could not so easily pursue ideological convergence because it exercised no formal control over the internal affairs of Kuwait (although its informal influence was quite extensive). The cultural and political heritage of the two states was also so different that voluntary convergence was impossible. International solidarity between the two states could only be pursued to a very limited extent. Kuwait would never have desired to become or even have benefited from being part of a Western bloc. Its desires for international solidarity lay more with the Arab world.

The British government was primarily interested in excluding other powers from the areas surrounding the route to India. The Gulf and the shores of Arabia formed part of the strategic defence of this route along with the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal, Egypt and East Africa, the Mediterranean and the Straits of Gibraltar. The disposition of British forces during the Second World War has been taken by many,

including the United States government at the time, as evidence of British commitment to empire and relative indifference to the fate of north-west Europe. The Americans “were convinced that the British approach was above all political and aimed at maintaining its long term influence in the Mediterranean.”<sup>41</sup> India's independence in 1947 meant that the route to India was no longer the underlying strategic rationale for British interests in the Gulf. But trade routes to the oil fields and the Far East, coupled with containment of the Soviet Union provided fresh justification for the traditional strategy.

The al-Sabah ruling family negotiated Kuwait into a patron-client relationship with Britain, at the end of the nineteenth century in order to safeguard Kuwait's security and autonomy from an external power, the Ottoman Empire. One of the side effects of this development was that it helped the al-Sabah family to control domestic political groups.<sup>42</sup> Imperial and client relations often change the distribution of social power. Tétreault wrote that the relationship with Britain insulated the ruler from domestic political pressures. Tétreault went on to say:

**Such changes in the social bases of colonies and clients persist after independence and may impair the state's ability to exercise social control. Kuwait is an example of the opposite effect, a state that gained in relative power with respect to domestic social groups as the result of imperialism.**<sup>43</sup>

This reciprocal flow of resources was the key to understanding the changing nature of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. As British power declined in the Middle East, the security that it could offer Kuwait was reduced. Rather than securing the al-Sabah regime, the relationship at times was a liability. The Anglo-Kuwaiti association was for the first fifty-five years asymmetrical in resources and power. However, with the increased dependence of Britain on Kuwaiti oil and sterling deposits and the reduction in British power after the Suez debacle, this began to change. The revolution

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<sup>41</sup> Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994) p. 599.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Persian Gulf and United States Policy: A Guide to issues and References* (Claremont, California: Regina Books, 1984), p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", p. 566.

in Iraq in July 1958 and the resulting formation of a hostile regime on Kuwait's northern border realigned the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. It also finished off any integrated security planning that Britain might have had for the region, and struck another blow against British power in the Gulf and the Middle East. The British government was left pursuing economic interests in Kuwait rather than any strategic ones in the whole area.

Despite the power political problems the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship was characterised by affinity and loyalty. The relations of the Political Residents at Bahrain and the Political Agents in Kuwait with the various rulers of Kuwait were always close and personal. This historical loyalty, a characteristic of client-patron relations, helped cement the union.

The bond also maps neatly the four specific elements identified by Shoemaker and Spanier as inherent in patron-client relations. First, the relationship was defined by the asymmetry of military resources. Second, client motivation was lack of security, stemming from an inability to be militarily self reliant. Third, the bond was a part of the patron's wider concerns and interstate relations, and the perception of other actors was that Kuwait was closely bound to Britain. Fourth, the relationship was fluid and not well defined, the exception to this only coming during crisis periods.

### 1.3.2b The themes and the main argument defined by clientelism

The general themes and the main argument of the thesis tally with the theoretical goals and problems of the patron-client theory. The themes connected with the international politics of the region and the other major actors (the Anglo-American alliance, internationalisation of the Gulf, Nasser and Arab nationalism) are partly defined and explained by clientelist theory. The Anglo-American alliance, itself a partial client-patron relationship, was deemed crucial by the Macmillan government to British security and foreign policy interests. These interests included the power needed by Britain to maintain its patron-client relationships. The alliance gave Britain the vital additional strength in perception and reality that was needed to sustain its position in the Gulf and in its relationship with Kuwait. The Macmillan government sought support from both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations for any possible use of military force in Kuwait to limit the threats of other actors in the region. This was vital for the effective continued provision of security by Britain to Kuwait that was so essential to the relationship. The other three themes (internationalisation of the Gulf, Nasser and Arab nationalism, and the Arab-Israeli question) all had influence on Britain's ability to guarantee Kuwait's security and on the shape of the patron-client relationship. The British government was unable to shape the views of the Kuwaitis on Nasser, Arab nationalism, or the Arab-Israeli question. The changing pattern of the patron-client relationship saw the take-over, by the Kuwaitis, of their external policies for the Arab world. Propaganda attacks on Britain's role in region from Radio Cairo also weakened its position. Rather than being a security asset for Kuwait the British were becoming a liability. At this time the Kuwaitis were pursuing a **Regulation** strategy. From Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 it can be seen that the decisions taken by the Kuwaitis fit into the theoretical framework of patron-client relations.<sup>44</sup> The increased economic prosperity of Kuwait coinciding with the declining power of Britain resulted in a desire by the client to decrease or restrict the relatively high interactions between

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<sup>44</sup>See p. 25 of this thesis.

the two states. However, the threat environment for Kuwait tempered this behaviour. The relative weakness of its security position caused the al-Sabah regime to pursue an **Accommodation** strategy.<sup>45</sup> This strategy was a mixture of increasing and restricting relations. The client pursued other ways of guaranteeing its security, but still under the shield of the clientelistic bond.

British problems with Nasser, Arab nationalism and the Cold War, were compounded by their inability to use their client states as instruments of general policy in the area. Britain was not alone in being unable to control its client states in supporting its overall policy objectives. Bercovitch writes that it "is probably true that powers are simply unable to use client states as the instruments of any general policies in the international arena."<sup>46</sup> He went on to say that the United States could not use Iran, even though it fully supported the Nixon Doctrine, to shape its relations with other states in the Gulf region. This is supported by Wriggins, who contends that:

**Superpower involvement increased the military capabilities of the regional states but did not cause the conflicts. Even though each of these patron-client relationships has been highly asymmetrical, the external power has shown only a limited ability to affect either domestic reforms or the direction of foreign policies if the local regime opposed them.**<sup>47</sup>

Examination of the main themes of this dissertation in the context of the patron-client model shows that after the Suez affair Britain could no longer exert consistent and decisive leverage on the general conduct of Kuwait's relations, yet its patronal influence continued to be strong at particular moments and conjunctures. Bercovitch argues that it is the "disjunction between the general conduct and the particular moments which make it very difficult to define the nature of the relationship."<sup>48</sup>

The other set of themes, relating to Britain's political, military and economic strategies in the region, can also be partly explained by the patron-client theory. The reduction and change in British power and position in the Gulf region can be fed into

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<sup>45</sup>See p. 25 of this thesis.

<sup>46</sup>Efrat and Bercovitch, Superpowers and Client States, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup>Howard W. Wriggins et al., Dynamics of Regional Politics: Four systems on the Indian Ocean Rim (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 197.

<sup>48</sup>Wriggins, Dynamics, p. 51.

the patron-client model. Depending upon whether Kuwait was experiencing either a high or low threat environment the relationship was one of either parity in influence or client prevalence. This theme, connected with the air barrier and the strategic projection of power, forms part of the need and the problem of Britain's patronal commitment to sustain Kuwait's independence. During the crisis of 1961 Kuwait sought a **Reinforcement** of the client-patron relationship. Military and diplomatic relations were increased and these themes took on greater significance for both patron and client.

The economic theme is bound up in the patron-client relationship. Oil, sterling balances held by the Emir of Kuwait, and the profits made by the British oil companies in Kuwait were the vital benefits that outweighed the costs for the British in the relationship. The increased dependency on Kuwaiti oil caused a change in the bond. The rationale behind Britain's wider Gulf stance became linked to the economic benefits flowing from Kuwait to Britain. The absolute minimum of compliance that the British government could accept from the Kuwaiti regime was the continued flow of its oil to the West on reasonable terms. Any threat to this minimum requirement was likely to lead to an ending of the reciprocal relationship and the possibility of military intervention by the patron.

Despite the possible frictions, the relationship had broad areas of policy agreement and few examples of discord. On the broad objectives Britain and Kuwait achieved a policy consensus. These objectives included guaranteeing the independence of Kuwait, maintaining regional stability, and the continued flow of oil and the economic prosperity derived from that oil. The areas of disagreement centred upon the tactics employed to achieve these objectives. This was caused by the divergences in the general perspectives of the two actors and, in what political scientists would term 'the overall policy environment'. Britain had broader concerns linked in with its world-wide commitments, the Anglo-American alliance, the British economy and the Cold War confrontation. Kuwait's perspective was much narrower and conditioned more by its local environment, with the primary objective of state survival. Secondary aims

included the security of its oil, defence of Islam and domestic autonomy. Divergences therefore appeared over issues related to the Arab-Israeli question, Nasser and Arab nationalism, the Cold War and the Baghdad Pact.

#### **1.4.1 Documents; the problems of the evidence**

The primary documents were approached with a certain level of scepticism and detachment, as records of any kind have distortions and problems. First, not all of the evidence is at the disposal of the researcher. Some files remain closed for periods longer than the statutory thirty years, either being retained by Departments for continued use or deemed to be too sensitive to open. Files that refer to or contain comments on individuals that could be distressing to first generation relatives fall into this category. Evidence that could still be damaging to British relations with other states is also kept closed. This undermines the credibility of the British archives and of research based on such records. Not all the evidence relating to Kuwait has been opened to the public. A number of documents referring to a variety of subjects on oil policy, sterling balances, arms sales and security have been retained.

The second problem of the primary evidence is the quantity. The researcher has to be careful not to miss the wood for the trees. There are vast quantities of information held regarding Kuwait in the state records. These include files from the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the War Office, the Cabinet Office, the Prime Minister's Office and the Board of Trade. The number of different types of information proves that relations between Kuwait and Britain were diffuse. Researchers develop an agenda to distinguish the trifling from the momentous, and a way to prioritise the files to fit the objectives set in the research. This very determination can be problematic and leads to the third issue: the assessment of the importance or relevance of the files. Should greater weight be attached to files from some Departments over others? Should the files be placed according to the hierarchy of the decision making process? What appears to be a low level policy document may actually be of critical importance. Given limited time, the researcher cannot avoid being influenced by the order in which

files are read and knowledge is acquired, though there is a measure of arbitrariness in deciding that order. The weighting of the documents will also be influenced by the notions of the researcher and the theories and arguments to be tested. The chosen theoretical lens defines the picture. Look for evidence to confirm an argument and it will almost certainly be found. The trap of making the evidence fit the theory is hard to avoid in a field where the crucial falsifying experiment is not available. A certain detachment from the sources is also important in weighing the specific Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. Britain's relationship with Kuwait, while important during this period, was only one of many such foreign relations. Anglo-Kuwaiti relations formed only one small part of the picture of British exterior relations, even in the Middle East. But to officials directly concerned in them they will have seemed of paramount concern, and this is reflected in the documents.

Finally, the researcher should reflect that the files only express a sanitised version of the state's views. These views, often presented as an agreed whole, hide the arguments and disagreements below the surface. The analyst can take for granted what the decision makers do because non-issues leave few traces in the official papers. Robert Skidelsky effectively argues this point.

**On any but the most resolute historians, all these memoranda have the same effect that they had on the Ministers for whom they were first produced: to show that nothing different could possibly have been done. A historian who comes, naked, to the corridors of power is almost as likely to write conservative history as is the politician who arrives in the same condition to make conservative history. . . . It is almost as if the 20th Century historians have been coopted into the Establishment via the Public Records Office.<sup>49</sup>**

#### **1.4.2 What the evidence reveals**

The most informative class of British Public Records relating to Kuwait derives from the Foreign Office, and consists mainly of reports from British diplomats in Kuwait and Bahrain. The most important of these are the annual reports produced by

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Skidelsky, "Going to War with Germany: Between Revisionism and Orthodoxy", *Encounter* 39 (July 1972), p. 58.



the Political Agent in Kuwait. These set out in detail the previous year's events and major developments in Kuwait as well as characterising the state of relations between Kuwait and Britain.<sup>50</sup> The Political Resident in Bahrain also produced annual reports that covered all of the Gulf Sheikhdoms. These reports combined with monthly reviews from the various Sheikhdoms give a comprehensive account of British diplomatic views of events in the region.

A number of key documents have shaped the major arguments of this thesis. These are mainly Foreign Office files but also include files from the Cabinet Office, the Prime Minister's Papers, the War Office and the Treasury. Files on British policy in the Middle East are located predominantly in the Foreign Office classes.<sup>51</sup> A number of conclusions can be drawn from these files about British policy-making towards the Middle East, the Gulf and Kuwait. First, the reports, memoranda and minutes were written by a handful of individuals, mostly of Ambassadorial rank, working in either London, Washington or the Middle East. The files clearly show that, within this small policy-making apparatus, an inner circle existed that governed the direction and shaping of policy in the region. The key players included Sir William Luce, Sir Roger Stevens, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and his two Foreign Secretaries Selwyn Lloyd and Lord Home.

The second general conclusion to be drawn from the official records is that changes in policy were undertaken slowly and deliberately. In essence British policy was 'change in order to keep things the same' as befitted the power in the region that had most to gain from maintaining the status quo. The documents indicate that the

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<sup>50</sup>Three examples of these reports include: PRO: FO 371/ 140064: Persian Gulf States: annual review for 1958; PRO: FO 371/ 148896: Persian Gulf: Annual Review for 1959; PRO: FO 371/ 156823: Kuwait: Annual Review for 1960.

<sup>51</sup>These include: PRO: FO 371/ 126845: UK policy in Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 132507: UK Policy on Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 132502: Effects of events in Iraq on Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Aden; PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK policy towards and influence in Kuwait; PRO: FO 371/ 141831: UK policy towards the Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 141830: US policy towards Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 150857: UK policy on situation in Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in Persian Gulf; PRO: FO 371/ 157392: Anglo-American talks on policy in Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 163972: UK policy in Middle East; PRO: FO 371/ 168632: Political Relations between Persian Gulf States and UK: Anglo-US Talks on Policy in Persian Gulf; PRO: FO 371/ 170165: UK policy in the Middle East.

underlying assumptions upon which British policy was made remained relatively unchanged. The Foreign Office view was that Britain could retain its position in the Gulf for the foreseeable future. This analysis complements the position adopted by Bruce Kuniholm who asserts that Whitehall was preoccupied with events elsewhere. He also contends that "Britain's unchallenged position in the Gulf left its purposes East of Suez undefined and its military presence unquestioned."<sup>52</sup> British documents show this to be only partly true, as indicated by the next observation.

Third, the documents show that this status quo position in the Gulf was supported by the majority of the Whitehall Departments interested in this area. The Cabinet and the Prime Minister were keen for Britain to remain a global player in the international system. The Gulf was a region in which Britain was welcomed by many of the actors who wanted Britain to continue its protectorate role. The Foreign Office was a strong defender of the position of Britain in the region, because of the prestige and status that such commitments offered Britain. The three services viewed commitments in the Gulf as a vital part to their arguments for maintaining force levels and budgets. The documents even show the Treasury supportive at certain times of the British commitment in the Gulf because of the sterling balances held by the Gulf states, and especially by the al-Sabah ruling family in Kuwait. This support by the various Departments for Britain's position in this area remained consistent and continued throughout the period, except from the Treasury, which was the only Ministry that had both the power and the departmental agenda to force through a proper cost-benefit analysis of the relationship between Britain and the Gulf Sheikdoms.<sup>53</sup>

Fourth, the documents show that British policy was, more often than not, shaped by rather than shaping events. The decline in power had made British policy reactive rather than proactive, with crises and upheavals prompting the major changes in policy. The documents also show that once a crisis presented itself the Prime

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<sup>52</sup> Kuniholm, *The Persian Gulf*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156892: Defence Against Iraq: Future policy on Kuwait: Comment by Treasury September 15, 1961: Peck to Stevens.

Minister, the Cabinet and the Foreign Office were very successful in producing and delivering a coherent responsive strategy. After each of the major upheavals in the Middle East in this period, the Macmillan government appeared to produce a policy response that was successful if judged by the criteria of maintaining the maximum amount of British influence with the resources available. The evidence shows that, considering the constraints, difficulties and risks involved in the area, the policy-making during crises was incisive. In contrast to this the policies pursued during periods of relative calm lacked coherence.

Information on the Anglo-American relationship in the Gulf is less abundant than material on British policy-making. However, there is evidence of United States support for military moves deemed necessary by Britain for the security of the West and its allies.<sup>54</sup> The United States government files are the best source of information on the Anglo-American relationship. They reveal the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations being supportive of the Macmillan government in the Gulf. They also show that the Americans deferred to the British in the Gulf, except over issues of vital concern to themselves.<sup>55</sup> The documents also indicate the Americans to have been much more realistic than the British about the position and capabilities of Britain in the Gulf and the Middle East.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156874: Defence Against Iraq: The possibility of assistance from the United States in Defending Kuwait, June 27, 1961: Walmsley.

<sup>55</sup> ELAK: Eisenhower Records, Records as the President, White House Files. Box No. 9. Summary Briefing Paper. General Concept of the Anglo-American Alliance; Papers of the President, International Series. Box No. 3. Memorandum of Conversation, United States Delegation to Bermuda, March 21-23, 1957.

<sup>56</sup> SDA: Department of State, Box No. 76. NND 911018. Intelligence Report: Prospects for the British Position in the Middle East During the Next Decade: Causes and Consequences of Decline, September 17, 1956.

## **Chapter 2: Building the Patron-Client Relationship**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter two is the first of the chapters devoted to the chronological developments of the thesis and covers the first year of the Macmillan premiership. The early part of the chapter provides an overview of British policy in the region since 1945 before examining the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship prior to 1957. The middle part of the chapter examines three major events of 1957 that have a bearing on this relationship: the pronouncement of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Bermuda Conference and the Sandys Defence Act. British defence policy is examined over the period from the Second World War until 1957 in order to place the Sandys White Paper in context. The later part to the chapter deals directly with developments in the patron-client relationship of Britain and Kuwait during 1957.

#### **2.2.1 Overview of British policy in the Middle East and the Gulf since 1945**

British policy in the Middle East underwent a change following the Second World War. This consisted much more in style and method of implementing policy than in its substance. The objective of the new techniques was to attempt to preserve the strategic, economic and political position of Britain in the region, by accommodation and by amelioration of conditions in various local states. Gone were the days when ministers in London could impose boundaries and settlements, make Kings and Princes and control the large regional powers. The reasons for this included not only the financial weakness of Britain but also the new realities of a changing world. Colonialism was discredited and resented. States and peoples were demanding self-determination and independence.

The new policy style could not prevent but only disguise a deteriorating British position in the Middle East during the two decades after the war. This reduction in power ultimately forced a change in the substance of policy, but not before the Eden

government had attempted a recovery at Suez. The process of change was accelerated by the inability of successive British governments to meet the large financial and political costs of maintaining a dominant military position in an increasingly hostile region. The rise of Arab nationalism undermined the position and the support that Britain had traditionally enjoyed in the area. Yet, up until the decision taken in 1968 by the Wilson government to withdraw British forces east of Suez, British governments remained committed to a major role in the Middle East. Bearing in mind all the forces ranged against them it was remarkable that the British managed to continue to exert significant power in the region for so long.

Britain was able to retain its influential position for many reasons. The three most important of these were the support extended by the United States, the incapability or unwillingness of other powers to supplant Britain, and the mutually beneficial nature of British relations with many states in the region. Other factors, such as the general perception that Britain was more powerful than it really was and the adroitness of government policy, also played a part.

The United States defended Britain's position by the extension of its support to states in the Middle East that aligned with the West. Its policy was implemented with varying levels of diplomatic, military and financial assistance. This helped Britain because it secured the position of many regimes that underpinned its position. In the Western alliance, during the first phase of the Cold War, Britain was given the role of ensuring the security of this region. The United States, up until the announcement of the Eisenhower doctrine in January 1957 and excluding the Suez affair, was prepared to take a secondary position and to be supportive of its partner's Cold War role. While the United States was unwilling the Soviet Union remained unable to project power into the region until it made the diplomatic breakthrough with Nasser and Egypt by way of the Czechoslovakian arms deal of 1955.

The underlying aim of British policy was to maintain the status quo at a reduced level of expenditure. The Foreign Secretary in Attlee's Labour government,

Ernest Bevin, attempted to create new and equal partnerships with the Arab states by removing British troops from their permanent base facilities while retaining the right of re-entry during periods of war.<sup>1</sup> This was 'imperialism on the cheap' with base facilities available when Britain would most need them, but without the economic and political costs of direct imperial control.<sup>2</sup> This policy met with little success: the attempted treaty with Egypt ended in deadlock over the issue of the Sudan, and the 1948 Portsmouth Treaty with Iraq was not ratified by the Iraqi parliament.

Despite the efforts of the Attlee government, British prestige and influence in the Middle East continued to decline. The ignominious withdrawal from Palestine in 1948 and the failure of the Iraqi parliament to ratify the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1948 were indications of the changed position of Britain. The Free Officers' coup in Egypt in 1952 and the subsequent Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1954 defining the British withdrawal from the Suez Canal base were clear indications of British weakness. The nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Iran in 1951 and the dismissal of Glubb Pasha in Jordan on March 1, 1956, put British influence in the Levant and the Gulf further in question.

Following the independence of India in 1947, part of Britain's strategic rationale for Britain being in the Gulf had effectively ended. At the same time, new objectives had emerged with the start of the Cold War. Policy was now directed to ensuring the continuation of cheap oil supplies to the West and containing Soviet expansionism. Yet these developments did not prompt a reappraisal of strategic doctrine. As David Reynolds writes: "The [British] Government did not pull out of Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq and Egypt, which henceforth became the new foci for British power."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-1951 (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Gallagher, The Decline.

<sup>3</sup> David Reynolds, Britannia Overruled: British policy & World Power in the 20th Century (London: Longman, 1992), p. 169.

As Sir William Luce was to point out in 1967, this was because oil and containment acted virtually as substitutes for India.

**If our interest in the Gulf and South Arabia was so closely linked with our interests and policies in India, it might well be asked why our disengagement from those areas did not follow our withdrawal from India in 1947. But by then two new factors had emerged and had to be taken into account in deciding future policy in the Gulf: the onset of the cold war and the discovery of great oil resources in the Gulf area.<sup>4</sup>**

The nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, under the direction of Mossadeq in 1951, led to a lessening of the dependence of Western Europe on Iranian oil. The demand was taken up by the meteoric rise in the production of oil in Kuwait. This oil together with the massive sterling deposits held by the al-Sabah ruling family suddenly gave the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship an unprecedented salience in the British official mind at a moment when a precisely opposite tendency might have been expected.

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<sup>4</sup> William Luce, "Britain in the Persian Gulf: Mistaken Timing over Aden", The Round Table 227 (July 1967), 227-283.

### **2.2.2 The historical Setting of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship**

The links between Britain and the Gulf dated back to the eighteenth-century victories of Clive that had led to British dominance in India, the Indian Ocean and much of Asia. The lower Gulf area, the Arabian peninsula and east Africa formed part of the 'sacred' trade routes to India, giving the British a strategic justification for interest in the area.<sup>5</sup>The upper Gulf remained a relative backwater for the British and it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that Britain extended formal protection to these sheikhdoms.

The British government signed an agreement in 1899 with the de facto leader of Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah. This secret treaty, known as 'the bond', contained a number of promises by both parties. Sheikh Mubarak and his successors promised neither to receive any agent of a foreign power nor to cede any part of their territory to any outside power without the prior consent of the British government. In return, for this agreement being observed and kept secret, the British promised to extend their "good offices" along with a cash payment of 15,000 rupees.<sup>6</sup>A number of other agreements were made between Kuwait and Britain over the next sixty-two years.

The treaty of 1899 was the beginning of the patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait or, more accurately at this stage, between Britain and the al-Sabah ruling family. First the relationship was mutually beneficial. Faced with a highly threatening environment, Sheikh Mubarak found the only way to retain a measure of internal autonomy coupled with external security was to develop a relationship with Britain. The agreement known as the 'bond' between Britain and Sheikh Mubarak and his successors legitimised a move from ruling family to royal family.<sup>7</sup>From the tribal

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<sup>5</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, The Making of Modern Gulf States (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 7; Brown, International Politics, p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> J.C. Hurewitz, The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: 1535-1914, 1 (London: Yale University Press, 1975), 475; David H. Finnie, Shifting Lines in the Sand: Kuwait's Elusive Frontier with Iraq (London: Tauris, 1992), pp. 15-18.

<sup>7</sup> Finnie, Shifting Lines, p.18.



system of mercantile consensus, Kuwait moved to hereditary monarchy. The monetary gains that the al-Sabah family made from clientelism allowed them to be financially independent of the mercantile class. It also allowed the ruler to hire a bodyguard, and this helped safeguard his position.

The British, with their Royal Navy, gained by keeping other powers out. This command of the waters of the Gulf was of prime importance, as was indicated in a United States special report on the implications of British withdrawal from the Gulf some years later:

**The waters of the Gulf have a fundamentally simple military and strategic aspect. Twenty-six miles of island-studded water separate Arabia from Iran at its entrance at the Straits of Hormuz; to seal that entrance, or to deny free movement of shipping within it, is relatively easy. The Gulf could thus be made into a lake having no communication with the outside world. In this sense, command of the Gulf waters implies command of the entire littoral.<sup>8</sup>**

Kuwait was strategically important to Britain at this time for three reasons. First, it had been nominated as the terminus for the controversial Berlin to Baghdad railway. Second, as a natural sea port at the northern most part of the Gulf it could provide a base from which to control Gulf waters. Third, its geographical location made it an ideal base for the projection of force into Mesopotamia by way of the Tigris and Euphrates basin.

British policy towards Kuwait, from 1899 up to the First World War, was governed by the desire to keep the region stable and out of Ottoman control. The relationship with Kuwait had been made primarily to halt the European powers' challenge to the British position in the Gulf and to control the route to India.

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<sup>8</sup> Special Report Series No. 8: The Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal (Georgetown University, Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1969), p. 68.

So began what Robert Litwak has described as:

**[An] era of British paramountcy and protection which saw an outside power playing the role of manager, guardian and arbiter of the region. Intervention by outside powers [he continues] was deterred, piracy and smuggling were suppressed, interstate conflict were frozen, and coups were either vetoed or encouraged pre-emptively. As a result of the UK's presence, disruptive forces were contained and their manipulation by outside forces prevented.<sup>9</sup>**

An understanding was reached between the British and the Ottomans over the jurisdiction in Kuwait. This understanding, that was known as the 'status quo', was formalised at the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of July 29, 1913. Finnie characterises the parts of the 'status quo' agreement as: "1. Great Britain recognises Ottoman 'Suzerainty' (a word carefully chosen) over Kuwait. 2. The Turks will keep hands off Mubarak and refrain from interference in the affairs of the Sheikhdom. 3. Britain will not establish a 'protectorate' in Kuwait."<sup>10</sup>This agreement was entirely ambiguous. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, viewed the 'status quo' agreement as nonsensical: "It seems to me that we are now in the quaint situation of having admitted and denied the suzerainty of the Sultan, both accepted and repudiated his sovereignty, and both asserted and given away the independence of the Sheikh."<sup>11</sup>This ambiguity in Anglo-Kuwaiti relations was, however, a common characteristic of patron-client relations, captured by Shoemaker and Spenser as their fourth characteristic of clientelism - where the relationship remains fluid and non-defined.<sup>12</sup>

The outbreak of world war in 1914 prevented ratification of the 1913 treaty. Mubarak declared loyalty and allegiance to Britain on August 21, 1914, promising the support of Kuwaiti forces. This went against the wishes of the majority of Kuwaitis as it signified a pledge of support for Christian Britain over Muslim Turkey. The Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Percy Cox, responded to the declaration by Mubarak with a letter. Cox requested Mubarak to attack and occupy Umm Qasr, Safwan and the Island

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<sup>9</sup>Shahram Chubin, Robert Litwak and Avi Plascow, Security in the Gulf (Aldershot: IISS, Gower, 1982), p. 111.

<sup>10</sup>Finnie, Shifting Lines, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup>Finnie, Shifting Lines, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup>Shoemaker and Spanier, Patron-Client, p. 16.

of Bubiyan. Three promises were made by the British to Mubarak in exchange for this support.

**The date gardens situated between Fao and Qurnah shall remain in your possession and in possession of your descendants without being subject to the payment of revenue or taxes...If you attack Safwan, Umm Qasr and Bubiyan and occupy them the British Government will protect you from any consequences arising from that action...The British Government does recognise and admit that the Sheikdom of Kuwait is an independent Government under British protection.**<sup>13</sup>

This was the continuation of the reciprocal nature of the patron-client relationship with security being offered in return for alliance alignment. Importantly, Britain for the first time had recognised the independence of Kuwait.

A number of other agreements were made between Britain and Kuwait between the signing of 'the bond' and the letter from Cox to Mubarak in 1914. The most important of these was an agreement, signed in 1913, that outlawed the award of any oil concession without the consent of Britain. There was also a secret 1907 agreement that enabled Britain to lease a large area of land where the proposed plan for the Berlin-Baghdad rail terminus was situated. All the agreements entered into with Britain during this period signified that the client regime of Mubarak was following a policy, (consistent with Table 1.2 and Table 1.3) of **Reinforcement** with Britain.<sup>14</sup> The economic and security weaknesses of the al-Sabah regime, during a period of a heightened external threat, left Mubarak desiring a closer relationship with Britain.

By the end of the First World War, Britain and France had replaced the Ottoman Empire as the dominant power in Mesopotamia and the Levant. The Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France split the Levant into two spheres of influence. The British sphere was Palestine, Trans-Jordan and Mesopotamia, while France controlled Syria and Lebanon. Britain now had a preponderance of power in the Levant to supplement its hegemony in the Gulf. However, the external threats to

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<sup>13</sup>Jacob C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: 1914-1945*, 2 (London: Yale University Press, 1979), 6-7.

<sup>14</sup>See p. 25 of this thesis.

Kuwait had not disappeared. The rise of the Kingdom of Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia posed a threat to all the Gulf Sheikhdoms and Kuwaiti forces were defeated twice in 1920 by the forces of Ibn Saud. Sheikh Salim requested British assistance, and a subsequent show of British military strength succeeded in driving the Wahhabi forces out of southern Kuwait.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship was not all smooth at this time. Britain acted on occasion against the interests of Kuwait in its dealings with the wider area of the Gulf. An example of this was over the border issue. The British League of Nations Mandate for Iraq allowed Britain to attempt to delineate the various borders in the region. At the Uqair Conference of November 27 to December 3, 1922, boundaries were drawn between Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. This process was supervised by the British High Commissioner for Iraq, Sir Percy Cox. At this conference two thirds of Kuwaiti territory was given to Saudi Arabia by Cox in exchange for acceptance by Ibn Saud of the boundary line between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait had been badly let down by its patron, but the power politics of the situation meant that the then ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmad al-Jabir, had little choice but to accept the agreement.

On July 24, 1923, in the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey formally renounced all her rights to territories and titles that came outside those laid down in the treaty. It was also agreed that the Arab areas should be split into separate territories.<sup>15</sup> Kuwait would no longer be threatened by Ottoman expansion, and during the 1920s the threat to Kuwait emanated instead from its southern border with Saudi Arabia. Between 1923 to 1937 Ibn Saud enforced a blockade against Kuwait. This blockade was directed "against Kuwait's refusal to collect customs and transit duties for Ibn Saud's account, on traffic bound for the interior."<sup>16</sup> The patron-client relations suffered from this blockade because Britain was unable to get it lifted and there were suspicions on the Kuwaiti side that Britain was actually behind the damaging blockade.

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<sup>15</sup> Hurewitz, *The Middle East*, 2, 325.

<sup>16</sup> Finnie, *Shifting Lines*, p. 86.

The al-Sabah regime pursued, in the terms of Tables 1.2 and 1.3, a **Reinforcement** of the patron-client relationship in February 1928.<sup>17</sup> The threat posed by forces in the south resulted in British forces being sent into Kuwait. John Bagot Glubb, who at this time was a British officer with the task of policing the Iraqi-Saudi border, wrote that on February 17, 1928, authority had been given for "the RAF to operate in Kuwaiti territory, and one flight of aircraft and one section of armoured cars were based in Kuwait town. H.M.S. Emerald arrived in the bay of Kuwait."<sup>18</sup>

Without the support of Britain, Kuwait would certainly have been absorbed by the Kingdom of Ibn Saud. During the last decade before the Second World War one of the perennial questions in London was the 'status of Kuwait'. Concern was expressed, following the independence of Iraq after the end of the mandate, about ensuring the territorial integrity of Kuwait. Just prior to the independence of Iraq, in 1932, the western and northern boundaries with Kuwait were semi-officially recognised by the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Said, in the Iraq-Kuwait Convention of Boundaries. However, following independence, Iraq laid historical claim to Kuwait, and throughout the 1930s Sheikh Ahmad was faced with pressures from annexationist quarters in Iraq under the colourful leadership of King Ghazi.

Discussions were held in the Foreign Office in 1933. Kuwait was viewed by Britain as important because of uncertainties about British relations with Iraq after the end of the mandate. Kuwait was also significant as a link in the air route from Britain to Asia and Australia. The oil issue did not figure in the considerations over Kuwait by the British. Finnie writes that "oil was certainly not on the minds of the officials who met in October 1933 to consider British policy toward Kuwait; in fact oil seems to have played no great part in British policy anywhere in the Gulf in the 1930s."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

<sup>18</sup> John Bagot Glubb, War in the Desert (New York: Newton, 1961), p. 198.

<sup>19</sup> Finnie, Shifting Lines, p. 88; Alvin J. Cottrell, ed., The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 89.

The period of 1899 to 1939 can be regarded as one of success for the patron-client relationship of Britain and Kuwait. The identical policy objective of the al-Sabah ruling family and Britain, of keeping Kuwait an independent and distinct entity, had been achieved. The patron-client relationship gave Britain a semi-colonial control over the Sheikhdom without the full cost of colonialism. This effective and quiet control was achieved with no drain on military resources and with limited financial costs. British policy in Kuwait, motivated by strategic objectives, was bound to be successful considering the poor security and financial position of Kuwait.

For the al-Sabah ruling family the patron-client relationship was of vital importance as it gave them internal political authority and external security. The economic weakness of the al-Sabah regime during this period meant that there was a consistent emphasis on the goal of economic well-being. Deals made with the British by the Kuwaitis always had an element of financial benefit for Kuwait written into them. The policy goals of the al-Sabah regime because of this position were therefore, (in the terms of Tables 1.2 and 1.3), either **Accommodation** or **Reinforcement** goals.<sup>20</sup>

One unfortunate side effect of the bond was the limitation that it placed on the social and political evolution within Kuwait. The financial independence that the relationship gave to the al-Sabah family led to an exclusion of the wider mercantile elements in the governing process.<sup>21</sup> As Mary Tétreault writes "in the case of Kuwait, the instrumental power of the state vis à vis domestic society was extensive, at least in part as a result of British intervention favouring a strong ruling family over a more democratic organisation of the state and the regime." She goes on to say that "cliency affects political development in the client state by increasing the autonomy of the state with respect to domestic social groups."<sup>22</sup> This phenomenon of internal political

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<sup>20</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> Jill Crystal, "Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar", *Comparative Politics* 21 (July 1989), 427-43.

<sup>22</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", pp. 568-569.

relationships within cliency reflects a general characteristic of cliency at the domestic and state level of analysis; that clientelist relations are dominated by vertical over horizontal ties.<sup>23</sup> British patron-client relations had legitimised and perpetuated the fragmented Sheikhly political system in the Gulf region.<sup>24</sup>

In 1934 the oil concession was awarded for the entirety of Kuwait to the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), jointly owned by American and British oil companies. Oil would change the patron-client relationship in the post war period. In the pre-war period the signing of the oil concession enhanced the need to demarcate the Iraq-Kuwait border, because this now had important commercial implications for KOC. Unfortunately this border, though described in words in 1913, 1923 and 1932 had never been demarcated. Despite consistent British pressure on Iraq between 1938 and 1956 the issue was never resolved.

The growing financial strength of the al-Sabah regime, derived from oil royalties in the post war period, was both a blessing and a burden to the security of Kuwait. It made Kuwait a more important client for the British, as they became increasingly dependent on Kuwaiti oil after the problems in Iran between 1951-1953. Ironically, its increased wealth made Kuwait an even more tempting prize for Iraq.

### **2.3 Britain's position in the Middle East at the beginning of 1957**

The events of Suez have been well documented in the academic literature. A close analysis of this crisis is not called for here. However to place the thesis in context a bare outline of events is needed. In September 1955 Nasser made an agreement with the Czechoslovakian government to provide Egypt with modern weaponry. This move broke the Western monopoly on arms in the Middle East region. It also confirmed to the British government the need to remove Nasser from power. The next precipitative

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<sup>23</sup> Ravenhill, *Collective Clientelism*, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Glen Balfour Paul, "Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates: Political and Social Evolution" in Richard Ian Netton, ed., *Arabia and the Gulf from Traditional Society to Modern States, essays in honour of M.A. Shaban's 60th birthday* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 157.

event took place in July 1956 when, mainly for financial reasons, Washington abruptly withdrew funds from the Aswan Dam venture. Angered by this move, but also by the need to raise the necessary capital for the Aswan Dam project, Nasser nationalised the Suez canal on July 26, 1956. In an emergency Cabinet meeting the next day the British government determined that the Suez canal was of vital importance to Britain and the West, and that if economic and political pressure failed then the military option would have to be used.

Following a number of top level meetings a secret agreement was reached between Britain, France and Israel. It was agreed that Israel would attack Egypt, and this would be used as justification by Britain and France to occupy the canal zone. In the process it was hoped that Nasser would be destroyed. Unfortunately the Eisenhower administration, preoccupied with the forthcoming presidential election, publicly and privately opposed the use of the military option. Despite this opposition, Israeli troops entered the Sinai on October 29, 1956, and secured the Straits of Tiran. A week later in accordance with the secret agreement British and French troops entered Egypt. However, within twenty four hours Britain had been forced to halt its operations by pressure exerted by the United States and the international community. Eisenhower and George Humphrey, United States Treasury Secretary, put together a number of economic sanctions against Britain. These included the American Federal Reserve selling large quantities of sterling, the holding up of emergency oil supplies to Europe, and the blocking of Britain's drawing rights on the International Monetary Fund. These acts forced the British government to halt military operations before its forces had achieved their objective of securing both ends of the Canal. The parity of sterling was considered too important by the Cabinet. A face-saving solution of intervention with United Nations peace-keeping troops was found for Britain and France by the Canadian government. Suez had become a political disaster for the Eden government with a split in the Commonwealth and damage to the 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States.



British paramountcy in the Middle East was over before Suez. The war had been an attempt to reassert it. Suez did not force a retreat from Empire, but merely emphasised that this was already under way. Neither did the Suez crisis force Britain to turn to Europe. The effect of the war on Britain was to bring down the Eden government and severely damage its international standing, because the failure at Suez had clearly demonstrated the financial weakness of Britain, and its second rate power status.

Despite Suez the British were still key players in the Middle East region. The new Macmillan government set out a number of general aims for its Middle East policy. The importance of the Middle East region's oil, finances, and trade to the West made stability a central concern. British policy, therefore, had the reduction in tension between Israel and the Arab world as a primary aim, and if this was not possible then at least a policy of perceived neutrality on the issue. The accusations of collusion with Israel had been one of the most damaging aspects of the Suez affair for the British. The security and integrity of Jordan and Kuwait were essential to the broader British aim of Middle East stability. These states were viewed as the linchpins of stability in the Levant and the Gulf, respectively. The independence of these states therefore remained a consistent aim of the British government.

British security concerns were still bound up in the Cold War conflict. The Middle East, because of its strategic importance in any global conflict, remained a crucial theatre of the East-West confrontation. This was an important reason for maintaining bases that could be used to support an attack on the Soviet Union and defence of the region.

The increasing oil-dependence of the British economy and its increasingly precarious financial position ensured that reliable supply of Middle East oil at reasonable prices and the stability of foreign-held Sterling deposits were important British policy aims. British policy towards the Middle East region was therefore

tempered by the need to keep the vast financial holdings of the Gulf Sheikhdoms and Iraq in Sterling

Following the loss of the Suez base the military position in Aden and the Gulf had become even more important to the British government. At the beginning of 1957 Britain had a number of small military bases dotted up and down the Gulf. It also had large military bases in Iraq and in Aden. These bases were central to Britain's position in the area. The Middle East was also an important strategic and military link with the Indian Ocean and therefore the majority of the Commonwealth countries. British foreign policy was still ordered by Churchill's three circles of interest: Europe, the Commonwealth and the Atlantic alliance. Although the Macmillan government during its period of office was to implement a shift of emphasis from the Commonwealth circle to the European circle, at the beginning of 1957 the Commonwealth was still of vital concern to Whitehall.

The threats at the beginning of 1957 to Britain's position in the Middle East came largely from four directions. First was the threat from Nasser. Political triumph at Suez had made the Egyptian leader the dominant political force in the region. His brand of pan-Arabist socialism combined with an anti-imperialist policy made him the symbolic leader of a majority of the Arab people. Britain was one of his main targets. Radio Cairo was used to make vitriolic propaganda attacks on Britain's position in the area. The second threat came from the Soviet Union and Communism within the region itself. The Tudeh party had been a worrying element in Mossadegh's Iran. There were now other Communist elements in Iraq and Aden. These groups supported by Moscow, reduced the stability of the region and therefore represented a threat to Britain and the West. The third threat (at this time) came from the United States. The position of the Eisenhower administration over Suez had caused grave problems for the Eden government. The split with Britain's most important ally was a considerable concern for the new Macmillan government. It had become clear that the British position in the Middle East as well as in Europe was crucially dependent on the Anglo-

American special relationship. The fourth threat at the beginning of 1957, and throughout the period, was financial. The Suez war had highlighted and exacerbated the depth of Britain's financial predicament. Domestic financial pressures put into question the use of costly armed forces in areas such as the Gulf. Besides these four major concerns the possibility of a revolution in Saudi Arabia that could radicalise the whole area was a constant concern for the Foreign Office. So too was the prospect of a union of Egypt and Iraq that could squeeze Britain out of the region.

British alliances with Iraq and the Gulf Sheikhdoms were the key to dealing with most of these issues. In political and strategic terms Iraq was the most important British ally in the area. British bases at Habbanniya and Shaiba would be a key element in any East-West military confrontation. This was outlined in a report on future defence arrangements with Iraq written in 1954.

**The revised concept of a forward strategy for the defense of the Middle East in a major war is based on the power of the United Kingdom and its allies to inflict upon the enemy at the outset of hostilities such damage by air attack as would reduce the land threat to Iraq to manageable proportions. Our intention is to deploy North-eastwards with the object of holding the enemy land forces as far forwards as practicable, if possible in the passes leading from Persia to Iraq.<sup>25</sup>**

Iraq was also a bulwark against Egypt and Nasser, and this was important because Cairo was proving to be a more substantial threat to the West than even the Soviet Union. Division of labour between the two Western allies was also important. The United States was fostering close relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, while Britain concentrated on Iraq and Kuwait.

Bilateral treaties between Britain and the Gulf Sheikhdoms remained intact. The most important of these was the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. Its importance derived from the huge quantities of oil now being extracted from the Sheikhdome in the wake of the British-Iranian problems over Mossadeq and the oil nationalisation of 1951-1953. Kuwait had become the major supplier of British and West European oil.

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<sup>25</sup>PRO: FO: 371/ 115751: View on Future Defence Arrangements with Iraq: May 31, 1954.

Kuwait was also the major holder of sterling amongst the Middle East countries. This is why Kuwait had become Britain's most important relationship after Iraq in the Middle East by the beginning of 1957.

From 1957 onwards the importance of Kuwait for Britain increased. The Suez adventure had undermined Britain's position in the Levant and finished for good any influence over Egypt. Britain could no longer play a great power role in the Middle East and as a declining power its concerns were increasingly defined and shaped by economic interests. A clear break with Britain's past position had taken place after Suez. Major change in its relationships with states in the regions was now inevitable. Kuwait was one such state. It now played a major role in British thinking partly because Britain was now limited in its power and therefore in its concerns and interests. British attention was now closely though not yet exclusively directed towards oil and Sterling and since Kuwait held the key to both it now became the focus of British policy in the Gulf.

British influence in the Middle East had been unmistakably damaged by military intervention in Egypt. The perception of Britain as a great Middle East power had been shattered. Many of the alliances that Britain had in the region had been impaired as it became politically difficult for these states to remain close to Britain. There were a number of major developments that resulted from the Suez affair. These included: the State of the Union Address by President Eisenhower (the Eisenhower Doctrine) delivered on January 5 the Bermuda Conference of March 21-23, and the Sandys Defence White Paper presented to Parliament on April 4.

The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Bermuda Conference helped repair the West's position in the Middle East and bolster up the position of Britain. All three developments had a bearing on the position of Britain in the region and therefore upon Anglo-Kuwaiti relations.

### **2.3.1 The Eisenhower Doctrine**

The State of the Union Address of President Eisenhower set out what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. In response to the growing perceived and real threat of international Communism in the Middle East, President Eisenhower proposed three specific actions. The first was a commitment by the United States to help the states of the Middle East develop "economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence."<sup>26</sup> Second came a pledge to offer help in the area of military programs and assistance to any state desiring such aid. Third, the United States government offered an assurance that it would extend the deployment of its military forces for the protection of the political independence and or territorial integrity of any state requesting such assistance "against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international Communism."<sup>27</sup>

This statement became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. By it, the United States effectively took over responsibility for the Western interests in the Levant. While the announcement of the Doctrine, followed by the reconciliation of Britain and the United States at Bermuda, strengthened the British position in the Gulf region. The West was now presenting a united front from which Britain could derive much needed political and diplomatic strength.

United States interest and influence in the Gulf increased as well. This influence was still secondary to Britain. The contention of Moirara Ruehsen that the United States had become the dominant exterior power in the Gulf by 1956, does not withstand scrutiny.<sup>28</sup> The comments of the United States Ambassador to Saudi Arabia paint a different picture. Hermann Eilts interestingly stated that "the United States, in its desire to continue to permit the British to exercise whatever responsibility they

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<sup>26</sup>ELAK: Eisenhower Records, Central File, Official File, Box No 584, Address of The President of the United States delivered before a joint session of the Senate and the House of Representatives, Relative to the Middle East Situation, January 5, 1957. p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> ELAK: Box No 584, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Moirara de Moraes Ruehsen, "The Advent of American Hegemony in the Persian Gulf; 1953-1956" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1992), pp. 22-23. The contrary case, in favour of continued British primacy, is argued throughout the present dissertation.

could in those areas of the world where the British were still prepared to do so, preferred to allow the British to retain control." He went on to say:

**There was of course, an American policy relationship with Iran, with the Shah of Iran, and with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. But American policy in the Gulf area, or lack of policy really, was to a considerable extent the result of deference to the British. I recall so well that even as liberal an administration as that of President Kennedy - which came into office holding the strong belief that what we needed in the Middle East, as in the Arabian Peninsula, was significant political, social, and economic reform and which instructed its representatives in the field to press for such reform - did not really care to make much of an effort with the British on this very point.<sup>29</sup>**

Britain was still the dominant political and military force in the Gulf up until at least 1962. Elizabeth Monroe takes a similar view.

**In the coastal belt of southern Arabia that consisted of Aden colony and its dependencies, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, and the small Arab principalities of the Persian Gulf, British dominance survived. Unchallenged by other powers, it rendered the area a replica in miniature of the one time British position in the Middle East as a whole.<sup>30</sup>**

The United States signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia on April 2, 1957. This agreement was the continuation of an American-Saudi patron-client relationship similar to the one between Britain and Kuwait. In exchange for a five year lease of an air base in Saudi Arabia the United States promised to develop Saudi Arabia's military forces. Equipment over \$110 million was sold to Saudi Arabia covering military hardware, training and base constructions.<sup>31</sup> This move was important as it backed up the position of Britain in the area, because the stability of Saudi Arabia was of key importance in the maintenance of the status quo for the Gulf.

One political ramification of the greater involvement of the United States in the region was increasingly to isolate Egypt. The Eisenhower Doctrine effectively split the Arab world in two halves. Elie Podeh wrote that "one included Egypt and Syria, who

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<sup>29</sup> A Conversation with Ambassador Hermann F. Eilts; The Dilemma in the Persian Gulf (Chicago: The Chicago University Oral History Program, 1980), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Monroe, Britain's moment, p. 213.

<sup>31</sup> ELAK: Box No 584, January 5, 1957. p. 198.

rejected Western support, being more inclined towards neutralism; while the other consisted of the rulers who feared Communist penetration and were convinced that their future was tied up with the West, both ideologically and economically."<sup>32</sup>What transpired was the temporary formation of a royalist axis, with a rapprochement between Iraq and Saudi Arabia when the Iraqi crown prince met King Saud in Washington. The grouping of Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon effectively isolated Egypt, while Syria faced Western sponsored coup attempts in 1957. The isolation of Egypt up until the formation of the UAR gave Britain the much needed breathing space to re-establish some sort of position in the region. The Eisenhower Doctrine was therefore an important element in the recovery, albeit temporary, of Britain's position.

### **2.3.2 The Bermuda Conference**

The weakness of the British position in the Middle East had been accentuated by the problems that had developed in the 'special relationship' during the Suez crisis. Britain clearly no longer had the power economically or politically to maintain its traditional position in the eastern Mediterranean and the Levant. The situation for Britain in early 1957 in the Levant closely resembled its position in Greece and Turkey in 1947. Then America had taken over the burden of financial and economic aid necessary for the continued independence of Greece and Turkey. The Eisenhower Doctrine was continuing in the traditions of the Truman Doctrine, and filling the power void created by the British. What was needed for its success was a united Western bloc.

Anglo-American relations had been badly damaged during the Suez affair. The dangers to the Western world of a rift between America and Britain placed pressure on the Eisenhower administration and the new Macmillan government to patch up their differences. Sir Winston Churchill, in a letter to President Eisenhower shortly after the

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<sup>32</sup>Elie Pobe, "The Struggle over Arab hegemony after the Suez Crisis", Middle Eastern Studies 29 (1) (January 93), 101.

Suez affair, wrote: "Now, whatever the arguments adduced here and in the United States for or against Anthony's action in Egypt, to let events in the Middle East become a gulf between us would be an act of folly, on which our whole civilisation may founder."<sup>33</sup> A month before Macmillan became Prime Minister he met the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, in Paris. At this meeting Macmillan indicated that he himself had been:

**Unhappy with the way in which the matter was handled and the timing, but that Eden had taken this entirely to himself and he, Macmillan, had no real choice except to back Eden. Macmillan did not disguise the fact that he had always favoured strong action, but the point was that he did not like the manner and the timing, particularly vis-à-vis the United States.**<sup>34</sup>

Macmillan went on to say that: "The British Action was the last gasp of a declining power and that perhaps in two hundred years the United States 'would know how we felt'."<sup>35</sup>

It was agreed that the two leaders should meet at Bermuda to patch up the tensions in the relationship. The rapid growth in power of the United States coinciding with the relative decline in power of Britain formed the structural tension of the relationship. Combined with the United States being the natural successor to the British role as world leader, this was cause for some public and official dissension. The underlying problem for the British was summed up in a briefing paper prepared for the President prior to Bermuda.

**As the British have weakened, their policies in defence of Western positions have become less positive in areas where they judge their own interests to be less involved and, at the same time, they have become extremely sensitive to the threat of change in areas which they still believe vital to their national existence.**<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from Sir Winston Churchill to President Eisenhower, November 23, 1956, Foreign Relations of the United States, 9, 1955-57, (Washington D.C.: United States Government), 667.

<sup>34</sup> United States, Memorandum for the Record by the Secretary of State, Paris December 12, 1956, Foreign Relations of the United States, 9, 1955-57, (Washington D.C.: United States Government), 667.

<sup>35</sup> FRUS, 9, 1955-57, 667.

<sup>36</sup> ELAK: Eisenhower Records, Records as President, White House Files, Secret Summary Briefing Paper General Background: Traditional Concept of the Anglo-American Alliance, January, 1957. p. 1.



The British government had assessed its interests in the Middle East to be so important that military intervention in Egypt during the Suez crisis had been warranted. The threat of Arab nationalism supported by Communist subversion was judged to be a serious menace to the supply of oil to the West. The British governments of both Eden and Macmillan were critical of the policies pursued by the United States government towards Egypt and this belligerent Arab nationalism. One of the first discussions at Bermuda between Eisenhower and Macmillan was on this subject. John Foster Dulles wrote: "In discussing the problem of relations with Egypt, Mr. Macmillan raised what he called the '\$64 thousand question',...namely, were we going to wage political and economic warfare against Nasser or seek some arrangement with him in relation to Israel and the Canal..."<sup>37</sup> There remained differences in opinion between Britain and the United States over Nasser, but it was agreed that a joint policy of working towards the opening of the Canal should be pursued. Over Gaza and Aqaba there were large measures of agreement between the two sides. The need for stability and prevention of extreme action was agreed as being a joint objective.

A significant proportion of the talks on the Middle East was given over to the access to and production of oil in the Middle East. The protection of Kuwait was the key part to this problem.

**Harold Macmillan pointed out that Kuwait was really the key to a satisfactory answer. This is for the reason that even in a region where many areas are great producers of oil, Kuwait is by far the greatest of these and in itself can produce oil enough for all Western Europe for years to come.**<sup>38</sup>

Other difficulties and problems were brought up by both sides over Buraimi, Aden, Jordan, Egypt and Syria. The American delegation surmised that:

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<sup>37</sup> United States, Memorandum of a Conversation, Mid-Ocean Club, Bermuda, March 20, 1957 Foreign Relations of the United States, 17, 1955-57, (Washington D.C.: United States Government), 705.

<sup>38</sup>ELAK: Eisenhower Papers, Papers of the President, International Meetings Series, Box 2, Bermuda Conference, March 21, 1957. p. 4.

**So many different considerations apply in each of these problems that the only logical approach was to take our principal purpose or objective and subordinate all other purposes to a successful solution of this principal one.**

**This principal purpose is, of course, that of retaining access to Kuwait and an adequate flow of oil therefrom, for one of the requirements for success in this is to achieve better relationships with the surrounding areas, the principal one of which would be Arabia.<sup>39</sup>**

This issue, the maintenance of oil production along with access to it, was followed up with lower level talks in London between Deputy Under Secretary Henderson and Ambassador Trevelyan. A number of joint recommendations came out of these talks. These included measures to try to settle the critical frontier disputes between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Sheikdoms, British and American joint action to preserve the British position in the Gulf, steps to support and augment the security of Jordan and Lebanon, continuation of discussions on Syria and Egypt, and, most importantly, the further examination of strategies needed to ensure the continued uninterrupted flow of Middle East oil.<sup>40</sup>

Policy was being directed so that all other objectives were subordinate to the principal aim of ensuring the continued flow of oil. Attempts to settle border disputes such as the Buraimi issue was an example of this subordination of other objectives to the principal policy. The need for stability and security in the Gulf and the wider area of the Levant, in order that oil could be produced and transported, shaped British and American policy. The most crucial area of oil production for Western Europe was Kuwait. The importance of Kuwait and its place as the key objective in British policy towards the Arab Middle East had been made clear at the Bermuda Conference.

The question was posed of what would be done if there were to be a coup d'état in Kuwait. The British answered that if they were "confronted suddenly with a new and dangerous situation in Kuwait,...[they] would have to take action at once in this extremely important area."<sup>41</sup>Security of the Gulf in general and of Kuwait in

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<sup>39</sup>ELAK: Box 2, Bermuda Conference, March 21, 1957, pp. 4-5.

<sup>40</sup>ELAK: Box 2, Bermuda Conference, March 21, 1957, Progress Report on United States objectives and policies with respect to the Near East, June 27, 1957, p.3.

<sup>41</sup>ELAK: Box 2, Bermuda Conference, March 21, 1957, Memorandum of a conversation, Mid-Ocean Club, Bermuda, March 21, 1957, 3:45p.m. p. 8.

particular was discussed. Macmillan reiterated the need for the United States to foster guarantees that maintained security and peace in the region. It was decided that joint plans and objectives would be developed for the Gulf region.

Kuwait as well as now being one of the most important parts of British policy in the Middle East remained one of the most secretive areas of British policy. At the Bermuda conference the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, "pointed out the great importance that no word should leak to the press regarding the discussion of Kuwait."<sup>42</sup> There were three reasons for this secrecy. First, any mention of the security problems of Kuwait would increase the insecurity of the Sheikdom. Second, too close an association of Kuwait with the Western powers and in particular Britain would be damaging at this time. Third, mention of Kuwait would highlight the importance of this mini-state to Britain and the United States and could expose it to Arab nationalist and Communist attack.

The Bermuda Conference was judged to have been highly successful by both sides. Eisenhower described it as "by far the most successful international meeting that I have attended since the close of World War II."<sup>43</sup> The closer alignment of British and American policy in the Middle East sought by Eisenhower and Macmillan had been achieved. The working relationship between the United States and Britain became much closer. As John Baylis puts it the "United States seems to have been genuinely prepared to work closely with Britain from August 1957 onwards."<sup>44</sup>

The Bermuda Conference had a significant bearing on Anglo-Kuwaiti relations. At the highest levels of policy formulation the flow of Kuwaiti oil was placed as the key objective of British policy in the Middle East. The patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait had taken on its greatest significance following the Suez affair. The international status and the power of Britain had been severely damaged and reduced by the Suez crisis. This had reduced the **Affectivity** of the relationship, as may

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<sup>42</sup>ELAK: Box 2, Bermuda Conference, March 21, 1957, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup>ELAK: Box 2, Bermuda Conference, March 21, 1957. p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Baylis, Anglo-American Defence, p. 64.

be inferred from Table 1.1, and also fed into the future desires of the al-Sabah regime for greater independence from its patron. This it was to pursue through policies of **Regulation and Maintenance**.<sup>45</sup>

### **2.3.3.1 Background: British defence policy for the Middle East from 1945-1956**

At the end of the Second World War, British power in the Middle East seemed assured. The newly elected Labour government of 1945, presented with the post-war picture in the region, attempted a new rubric for imperial relationships. The application of this policy, crafted by the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, proved a failure and soon old policies and concepts inherited from the pre-war era were reinstated. These old policies were based on two key concepts. First, that the sea routes to the Indian Ocean and India should be controlled by the British Navy. Second, that no other great power should be allowed to interfere in the area either by installing bases or commanding ports. This strategic policy was most clearly demonstrated in the Gulf where by various means the Arab littoral had come under the dominance of the British.<sup>46</sup>

Only retrospectively was it clear that the British position in the Middle East had reached its zenith and was on an inevitable path of both relative and absolute decline. A commensurate change in British policy towards the region should have taken place. Interestingly, it was only the Prime Minister, Attlee, who broached the possibility of a structured withdrawal from both Africa and the Middle East. He classed these regions as 'areas of liability' and 'deficit areas'.<sup>47</sup>

The views of the Prime Minister were overridden and the policy remained the continued defence of this British 'sphere of influence'. The reasons for this included the high degree of inertia and institutional conservatism among the policy-making elites within Whitehall. Some of the attitudes within the policy bureaucracy towards the

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<sup>45</sup> See p. 22 of this thesis.

<sup>46</sup> Darby, *British Defence*, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), p. 299.

British presence in the Middle East remained based on the old colonial maxim: "We're there because we're there." Two of the most important parts of the bureaucratic machinery responsible for defence policy was the Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Having replaced the Imperial Defence Committee in 1946 the Defence Committee also became responsible for organising the various Departments into a co-ordinated whole in the event of war. The committee brought together all the key Cabinet members responsible for the formation of external policy including: the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Defence Minister, the Service Ministers, the Lord President of the Council, the Ministers of Supply and Labour, and the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>48</sup> Derby, outlining the inertia of this committee writes: "To some extent, therefore, it can be argued that the lack of firm political direction on defence issues was a by product of the committee system and of cabinet government... too many vested interests were involved for the defence committee to tackle the question of role."<sup>49</sup> The Chiefs of Staff Committee tended to encourage compromises being made between the three service ministries rather than action being taken on a specific strategic doctrine.<sup>50</sup>

The problems of this Committee were outlined by Field-Marshal Montgomery, who had served as Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1946-1948.<sup>51</sup> He became extremely critical of the system that he regarded as full of inter-service jealousies and general strategic indecision. The tight budgetary controls, imposed by the Treasury on the spending of military funds, intensified these inter-service rivalries. Each service criticised and tried to belittle the strategic importance of the other services, while at the same time trying to preserve or increase its share of the military budget. Another problem connected with the inter-service rivalry was the negligence of integrated

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<sup>48</sup> United Kingdom, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1958 Cmnd. 476, "Statement of Defence," paragraph 4.

<sup>49</sup> Darby, British Defence, p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> L.W. Martin, "The Market for Strategic Ideas in Britain: The 'Sandys Era' ", American Political Science Review 56 (March 1962), 23-41.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Law Montgomery, The Memoirs of Field Marshal; The Viscount Montgomery (London: William Collins, 1958).

weapons systems. One of the constant arguments between the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Army had been over the question of airlift facilities. The Army was eager to acquire sufficient airlift, but the RAF favoured expenditure on fighter aircraft. Unfortunately, the inability to resolve this question led to a massive lack of troop mobility, which led to a crucial failure during the Suez campaign when the army was unable to act quickly during the more favourable political climate of July and August 1956.

The problems of allowing the Services to be both the executors of policy and the determinators of that policy are summed up well by Martin. He writes that:

**Many post-war governments were apparently content to set an overall financial ceiling on defence, to lay down policy on certain matters of great domestic political significance such as National Service, to rule on possible applications of force, as at Abadan and Buraimi but to leave the allocation of the available funds to the bargaining of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.<sup>52</sup>**

The "ten year rule" adopted in 1946, unfortunately added to this lack of political direction over a strategic reassessment. Attlee instructed the Chiefs of Staff to presume that there would be no global or great power war for the next ten years. The political rationale behind this move was to constrain the military into using up existing stocks left over from the war and not to embark on any expensive re-equipment. The side effect of this was to remove the requirement for a fundamental strategic re-think which re-equipment and system development would have necessitated.

External reasons also played a vital part in the rejection of Attlee's view on the Middle East. The threat of Communist and Soviet penetration of the region was the most significant of these and as the Cold War developed its importance increased. The Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, and the Chiefs of Staff strongly opposed the idea of withdrawal. They believed that the Middle East was of vital strategic importance to Britain and that any abandonment of the region would lead to a power vacuum that the Soviet Union would quickly fill. Although the Cold War was not yet at its height, Attlee and Bevin had grown cautious and suspicious of the Soviet Union especially

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<sup>52</sup> Martin, "Strategic Ideas", pp. 24-25.

following the events in Iran in 1946.<sup>53</sup> The rationale behind this policy of stopping any Soviet moves into the region was a continuation of the traditional policy of trying to prevent any other great power entering the region. Communist and Soviet activity between 1945 and 1947 in Iran, Greece and Turkey and the West's response reinforced this view.

The Middle East was also a perfect strategic region in which to mount a counterstrike on the Soviet flank and to serve as a territorial hurdle for any Soviet penetration of Africa. The region was a vital communication point linking the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. The growing importance of oil to the West further amplified the critical significance of this area. Neither the importance of nuclear weapons nor their impact upon strategy were decisive at this point. The Attlee government had set British defence policy firmly on the route towards the attainment of nuclear weapons.<sup>54</sup> This would change the basis of much of the military doctrine adopted in the 1950s, with the logic of nuclear weapons ruling out prolonged global war that the old strategies had anticipated. Remarkably, nuclear technology played little part in policy orientation in the Middle East at this point. Finally, the Chiefs of Staff threatened to resign 'en masse' if any such policy undertaking was pursued by the Attlee government. The views of Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff prevailed. For all these reasons British policy in the Middle East continued to be based in its pre-war modes.

A major problem for the British government during this period was the cost of defence. Financial reductions were made to the budget but without a commensurate reduction in external commitments. The general opinion in Whitehall was that the economic recovery of Britain depended upon its trade and investments in the Middle East. Strategically the region was felt by many to be of the utmost importance, second only to the British Isles. This perception continued up until 1950 when the region was

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<sup>53</sup> Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal*, p. 436.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Rosecrance, *Defense of the Realm: British Strategy in the Nuclear Epoch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 36.

relegated to second place behind Europe with the stationing of a fixed force in Germany.

Up to this point the defence of the Middle East was planned around the holding of Egypt and the "inner ring" (Egypt and the geographical areas situated on the sea routes from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean). This strategic policy fitted in with the retention of large military facilities in Egypt. The "inner ring" strategy was based on the hope that the United States would reinforce the "outer ring" (Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf) areas in time of conflict, especially the crucial oil fields in the Gulf. The need for a re-evaluation of policy was prompted by the forthcoming closure of the British base in Egypt (1956) and also by the realisation that the further development of nuclear weaponry had brought into question any strategy reliant on large static bases.

The change came in 1952 when the Chiefs of Staff set up the basis for British defence policy for the rest of the decade.<sup>55</sup> This global strategy paper attempted to address the perpetual problem of too many commitments with too few resources. The nuclear deterrent was placed at the heart of the new strategic doctrine.<sup>56</sup> The weapons system was also believed to be cheap and the calculation was that this would allow for a cut in defence spending, while at the same time allowing Britain to remain in the great power club. In part two of the 1952 paper the manpower estimates for Europe and NATO were considerably cut because of the new tactical nuclear weapons.

The global defence paper still envisaged the need to defend the Middle East in war time and to counter any Communist expansion in the region. The nuclear deterrent, it was argued, would allow for the reduction of conventional forces in this area. With the projected withdrawal of British forces from the base in Egypt it was

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<sup>55</sup> Rosecrance, *Defence*, pp. 159-75.

<sup>56</sup> United Kingdom, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1952, Cmd 8475, "Statement on Defence".



estimated that conventional forces in the Middle East could be brought down to 160 aircraft and one division. This figure was further reduced in the 1953 defence review.<sup>57</sup>

The new strategic policy shifted the focus of defence to the "outer ring" in the Middle East: Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Jordan (the northern tier). This concept was promoted by Dulles in 1953, though the United States avoided conspicuous participation in the Baghdad Pact because its relations with Nasser would otherwise suffer. These "outer ring" states would be defended by small highly mobile forces backed up with air support from Cyprus, carrying nuclear weapons. The strategy was one of a decisive counter punch against any Soviet military moves in the region, rather than the Second World War scenario of a long drawn out conventional war. Large fixed bases were no longer desirable. What was needed were flexible and highly mobile forces. Although this was the theory, in practice British army units remained highly immobile, hampered by the lack of transport planes and the emerging problems of the air barrier. British global military demands in the Far East and Africa would further reduce the strategic readiness of the British in the Middle East.

The new strategy for the Middle East took pressure off the negotiations with Egypt over the Suez base. It also increased the political importance of the "outer ring" "northern tier" states such as Iraq and Jordan. This strategic rationale provided an impetus for re-negotiation of the treaty with Iraq and for the formation of a northern tier security pact that became the Baghdad Pact and then later the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO).

The problem remained that Britain had not adapted to its declining position in the Middle East either politically or psychologically. World and regional power politics had changed and the British needed to envisage a new political as well as military role for Britain in the region. Their failure to do so resulted, at Suez in 1956, in an old style military manoeuvre to back up an outdated political position.

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<sup>57</sup> United Kingdom, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1953, Cmd. 8768, "Statement on Defence".

The Suez conflict was a political disaster for Britain. It had many repercussions on the position of Britain in the world and in the Middle East. The most important of which was the exposure of the realities of British decline. Beeley commenting on this episode writes: "It might have been possible, as had happened in the history of earlier empires, for this decline to remain incompletely perceived for a longer period if its reality had it not been nakedly exposed by the failure of the disastrous Suez adventure of 1956."<sup>58</sup>

The reaction was to 'batten down the hatches' and wait for the storm to blow over. The Whitehall bureaucracy displayed an inability to recognise fully or deal with this fall from power. Many policy makers in Whitehall still believed that the special position that Britain had had in the region could be retained even if this was only in the Gulf. It would take a forceful minister with the full backing of the new Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, to modify these views.

#### **2.3.3.2 The Sandys 1957 Defence White Paper**

Duncan Sandys became Secretary of Defence in January 1957 in the new Macmillan government. He had been set a specific policy agenda by Macmillan that entailed the implementation of a substantial cut in expenditure and manpower in the armed forces.<sup>59</sup> Expenditure on defence had been running at an annual level of around ten percent of gross national product (GNP) over the preceding five years.<sup>60</sup> It was hoped that this high expenditure could be brought down to a figure of around seven percent of GNP by 1962. Sandys set out the basis of the two tasks that the armed forces would be expected to perform. "(i) To play their part with the forces of Allied countries in deterring and resisting aggression; (ii) To defend British colonies and

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<sup>58</sup> Beeley, *The 'Special Relationship'*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>59</sup> Christopher John Bartlett, *The Long Retreat, A Short History of British Defence Policy, 1945-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 129.

<sup>60</sup> United Kingdom, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1957, Cmnd. 124, "Outline of Future Policy".

protected territories against local attack, and undertake limited operations in overseas emergencies."<sup>61</sup>

The 1957 Defence White Paper was not the pivotal change in policy that many including the Defence Secretary took it to be. The paper described itself as the "biggest change in military policy ever made in normal times."<sup>62</sup> The reality was that Sandys had simply confirmed and rationalised many of the tendencies that had been developing during the 1950s. The paper was an expression of unspoken assumptions governing British defence in the previous decade. In the context of a longer perspective the paper seemed insignificant - far less radical than the eventual withdrawal from east of Suez.<sup>63</sup> Sandys reiterated the primacy of nuclear weapons over conventional forces in the event of a global war, although priority was given to the prevention of global war rather than the preparation for it. This was only a clarification of previous defence papers, as were the commitments to NATO, collective defence, and the ability to wage limited military operations in the Middle and Far East. The decision to end National Service by 1962, because of the need for economies in defence expenditure, was the most notable feature of Sandys paper.

The problem with the 1957 White Paper was that it was again asking the armed forces to cut back on expenditure without the equivalent cut back in commitments. The specific references to the Middle East region in the Defence White Paper clearly showed that the events of 1956 had not had the effect of reducing the commitments of Britain in the Gulf.

**26. Apart from its own importance, the Middle East guards the right flank of NATO and is the gateway to the African continent. In the Arabian Peninsula, Britain must at all times be ready to defend Aden Colony and Protectorates and the territories of the Persian Gulf for whose defence she is responsible. For this task, land, air and sea forces have to be maintained in that area and in East Africa. 27. In addition, Britain has undertaken in the Baghdad Pact to co-operate with the other signatory states for security and defence, and for the prevention of Communist encroachment and infiltration. In the event of**

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<sup>61</sup>Cmnd. 124, "Outline of Future Policy".

<sup>62</sup>Cmnd. 124, "Outline of Future Policy".

<sup>63</sup>Darby, British Defence.

**emergency, British forces in the Middle East area would be made available to support the Alliance. These would include bomber squadrons based in Cyprus capable of delivering nuclear weapons.<sup>64</sup>**

Two observations can be made about this section of the Defence White Paper. First, the underlying assumption that the Middle East was of crucial importance to the security of Britain and the West remained in place due to its strategic importance, the quantities of oil in the region and the danger a loss of any part of this area for the general balance of power in the Cold War. Second, the paper envisaged the need to prepare for both limited and total warfare in the region. Preparation for limited, so called "fire brigade", intervention in the area was crucial for the general defence of the Gulf. This approach was vindicated by events in the Oman in 1957 when a limited use of British forces quelled an internal revolt in the Kingdom.

#### **2.4 Developments of the patron-client relationship during 1957**

Writing a short time after Suez, Derek Riches, the Head of the Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office commented that "after Iraq, the Persian Gulf is both our most exposed and most important position in the Middle East and it would seem imprudent to hold no reserve to meet inevitable attempts at encroachment."<sup>65</sup>

The vital importance of Kuwait to Britain became clear during the Suez crisis. On November 1, 1956, even though the situation in Kuwait was relatively undisturbed by events in Egypt and the Kuwaiti government were confident of their ability to control any situation that might arise, British naval units were ordered to proceed towards Kuwait. The Political Resident at Bahrain, Sir Bernard Burrows, writing to the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, described events stating that "the local Defence Committee had taken the precaution of ordering H.M.S. Loch Insh, frigate from Basra, H.M.S. Superb, cruiser, with two companies of the Gloucestershire Regiment from the Trucial States and another frigate, H.M.S. Loch Fyne, with a military tactical

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<sup>64</sup>Cmnd. 124, "Outline of Future Policy".

<sup>65</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126845: UK policy in the Middle East: Note January 9, 1957: Derek M.H. Riches.

headquarters on board, from Bahrain to proceed to within three hours steaming time of Kuwait."<sup>66</sup>

The British were concerned about a meeting of Arab leaders being held in Beirut. There was apprehension in London that a general Arab boycott of British and French goods might be imposed and that if this happened Kuwait could possibly introduce restrictions on the consignment of its oil to Britain. Riches set out in a paper the problems associated with a military intervention to maintain oil supplies. First, the armed forces of Kuwait, although no match for the British forces, were likely to respond with force to any such intervention. Second, the Kuwaiti Oil Company would suffer from the withdrawal of labour and potential sabotage. Third, intervention would ignite a hostile response from the international community. Fourth, relations between Britain and the Gulf states of Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Sheikhdoms might deteriorate to the point of armed conflict.<sup>67</sup> Another problem was that the Treasury was against the idea of freezing Sheikh Abdullah's assets in London. This would be necessary to stop the considerable sterling balances held by the ruling family of Kuwait being withdrawn, causing a run on the pound. A Treasury official, Sir Dennis Rickett, "confirmed that the Treasury would be strongly opposed to the idea of using the threat to freeze the Ruler's sterling balances as a weapon."<sup>68</sup>

The situation for Britain in the Middle East at this time was extremely precarious. Sir Bernard Burrows writing to the Foreign Secretary on November 21, 1956, outlined his misgivings about the situation. In his final analysis he came out on the side of intervention only if the oil supplies were restricted.

**One clear conclusion of all this is that the consequences either of intervening or of not intervening are so bad that in forming our general policy in the Middle East more weight than hitherto should be given to avoiding a**

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<sup>66</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120619: Defence Forces in the Persian Gulf: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Report from Bahrain November 23, 1956: Burrows to Lloyd.

<sup>67</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120619: Defence Forces in the Persian Gulf: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Paper produced in Foreign Office November 15, 1956: Riches.

<sup>68</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120619: Defence Forces in the Persian Gulf: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Paper produced in Foreign Office November 15, 1956: Riches.

situation in which the Kuwaiti government might be led to restrict oil supplies. The method and timing of our intervention in Egypt was such as to impose the greatest possible strain on Anglo-Kuwaiti relations. We look like recovering from the strain by a fairly narrow margin. If there was another one we might well not do so without a major and dangerous operation.

My final conclusion is that if Kuwait attempted to restrict oil supplies to us it would, on balance be better for us to intervene by force if necessary to prevent this. It is by no means certain that we could do this without irreparable damage to our relations with Kuwait but the consequences of not doing it seem worse . . .<sup>69</sup>

British military forces were therefore prepared and ready for armed intervention in Kuwait if the oil supplies were stopped, although authority was not delegated to the diplomats on the ground but retained by the Eden government in London.<sup>70</sup>

Whether force would have been used or not will remain an open question. What is clear is the extent to which the British were dependent upon Kuwaiti oil and sterling balances and their apparent readiness to protect these two interests. It was clear though that as long as the oil continued to be exported, intervention would not take place. The patron-client relationship between Britain and the al-Sabah family was tested in this period. The British sought a **Maintenance** objective with the al-Sabah family during the Suez crisis. They wanted the relationship to remain the same with a preservation of the al-Sabah regime and a continued flow of oil. The al-Sabah ruling family was faced with pressures from its domestic population and other Arab states to pursue what amounted to a **Regulation** objective in the client-patron relationship.<sup>71</sup> On November 2, 1956, pamphlets were distributed by clubs in Kuwait. These pamphlets attacked the British action and called for strikes and meetings to be held on the morning of November 3. The al-Sabah regime reacted swiftly with police notices banning any strikes, demonstrations or meetings.<sup>72</sup> A mass meeting held in the bazaar

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<sup>69</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120619: British Forces in Persian Gulf: Security in the Gulf: Bahrain to Foreign Office November 21, 1956: Burrows to Lloyd.

<sup>70</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120619: British Forces in the Persian Gulf: Security in the Gulf: Foreign Office to Kuwait and Bahrain December 8, 1956: Lloyd to Burrows.

<sup>71</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

<sup>72</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120557: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Kuwait to Foreign Office November 2, 1956: Bell.

mosque the next day was easily dispersed by police and security forces. Further pamphlets called for a boycott of British and French goods, more strikes and the recruitment of volunteers to fight in Egypt.<sup>73</sup>

The al-Sabah regime also dealt with these problems by pursuing a **Maintenance** policy. This entailed a strong security policy pushed by Sheikh Mubarak, uncle of Sheikh Abdullah, at the same time as accommodation of certain activities of the domestic population that did not threaten security of the regime. This included a semi-official fund being established for Egypt. The fund was estimated to be over £1 million. Much of this money came from the royal family, and in government departments it was announced that employees were expected to contribute between a month and fifteen days salary to the collection. The boycott of British and French goods in shops was also enforced.

The interests of Britain and the al-Sabah regime were at this point common interests rather than identical ones. The overriding concern of the al-Sabah family was for the continuation of their domestic autonomy and political absolutism. British initiatives to promote democratic institutions in Kuwait were a casualty of these developments. This would have an important effect on the policy options for Britain with Kuwait. The American Consul in Kuwait, William Brewer summed this up by stating that Britain had: "lost a freedom of manoeuvre to which British officials were looking to preserve their strategic stake in Kuwait for many years to come. Henceforth, the chief British reliance must be on their community of interest with the paramount Shaykhs (sic) and on force."<sup>74</sup>

The Kuwaiti government in the long term reacted to the British action in Egypt by pursuing a policy of **Regulation**. The client-patron relationship during the Suez affair, rather than reinforcing the security of the al-Sabah regime, was damaging it. The

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<sup>73</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120557: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Kuwait to Foreign Office November 4, 1956: Bell.

<sup>74</sup>SDA: State Department Files Box 786D: American Consulate, Kuwait to Department of State, Washington November 27, 1956: William D. Brewer.

regime was still reliant on the relationship with Britain for the maintenance of its external security. The new domestic political pressures encouraged the regime to distance itself publicly but become privately closer with Britain and to pursue policies of greater autonomy in the client-patron relationship. Sir Bernard Burrows commenting on these new pressures wrote:

**Kuwait will probably never be quite the same again. Forces were unleashed there which are still interacting and which now in one direction and now in another raise the lid of Shaikhly control and suggest the possibility of greater trouble to come. There is more open resentment at the oppressive internal policies of the Shaikhs, more open criticism of the oil company and more open sympathy for pan-Arab causes in particular for the boycott of Israel.<sup>75</sup>**

The actions of the nationalist groups in Kuwait clearly shocked the ruling family and tempered their position, although the regime continued to reject calls for the cancellation of British projects or the dismissal of British state employees. The regime also continued to use its security forces to protect the Political Agency, the oil fields and the European quarter of Kuwaiti town. The strength of the nationalist movement in Kuwait was a threat to the al-Sabah regime itself, but the loyalty of the Sheikh's guards, the Fidawia, and the security forces held firm during the crisis. During December 1956 a fire was deliberately started at the Ahmadi number five oil field. Dissemination of information about the sabotage incident was kept to a minimum at the request of the Sheikh Abdullah, who was concerned to restrict hostile propaganda arising from the continued exportation of Kuwaiti oil to the West.<sup>76</sup> An incident took place in the Political Agency on December 30, 1956, when unknown persons attempted to set fire to the Residency by pouring kerosene over the Christmas tree, sofa and chairs in the main reception room. Fortunately, only the Christmas tree caught fire.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132748: Persian Gulf Territories: annual report for 1957: Bahrain to Foreign Office March 21, 1958: Burrows to Lloyd.

<sup>76</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120558: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Kuwait to Foreign Office December 12, 1956: Bell.

<sup>77</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126871: Internal Political Situation in Persian Gulf: Kuwait Diary No. 1 of 1957 Covering the Period December 24, 1956, to January 28, 1957.



The **Regulation** aim of the client-patron relationship by the al-Sabah regime was anticipated by the Foreign Office. Riches commented that:

**An inevitable progress of events towards a reduction in our influence and perhaps the eventual loss of our special position in Kuwait has been accelerated. As ever it is unlikely that any action we ourselves take in Kuwait itself can radically alter the speed or direction of this process: it is rather external events such as the elimination of Nasser or open and effective action against Israel which might have some effect. Even if we occupied Kuwait and tried to run it as a colony, I do not believe that we should be able to sit on the volcano for long.**<sup>78</sup>

This **Regulation** of the client-patron relationship was done at a very slow pace and the essentials of the relationship between Britain and Kuwait remained unchanged during 1957. In the Spring of 1957 the British government had reviewed its position in the Gulf. Concern was expressed over the hostile reaction directed at Britain during the Suez crisis and the consequential insecure position that Britain had in the Gulf. The question was whether this position should be maintained in its existing form or whether any substantial or general modification could be considered. The conclusion of these debates was that the Gulf was of such importance to Britain that the policy and the position should be maintained in its essential form. -

By late January 1957 the British forces built up in the Gulf during the time of the Suez intervention were being scaled down to the normal level and state of readiness.<sup>79</sup> Sir Bernard Burrows, visited Kuwait from March 11 to March 17, 1957 and undertook substantive talks with Sheikh Abdullah. The main purpose of the visit was to re-establish normal and friendly relations between the patron and the client. Sheikh Abdullah took the opportunity to emphasise to Burrows the continued importance that Kuwait attached to the British connection despite Suez.<sup>80</sup> He had come under pressure from domestic political forces during November and December 1956 to take actions that would have prejudiced the fundamentals of the Anglo-Kuwaiti

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<sup>78</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 120557: Security Situation in Persian Gulf States: Memorandum November 15, 1956: Riches.

<sup>79</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126856: Movement of Armed Forces in Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula: State of British Forces in Arabian Peninsula January 21, 1957: Riches.

<sup>80</sup>SDA: State Department Files Box 786D: American Consulate, Kuwait to Department of State, March 26, 1957: Brewer.

relationship. These pressures Sheikh Abdullah had resisted. He had called the al-Sabah family together, during the British armed intervention in Egypt, and "reminded them that the regime depended in turn on internal stability and that excesses of pro-Arab feeling were therefore to be discouraged."<sup>81</sup>

The patron-client relationship survived the Suez debacle. It was the most difficult few months that the British and the Kuwaitis had experienced in their relationship. Although outwardly the patron-client bond seemed intact, relations had changed. British influence over Kuwait had been reduced, the patron position being even more dependent upon the traditional goodwill and self interest of the ruling elite.

Relations between Iraq and Kuwait were not affected in the short term by the Suez War. By March 1957 talks had been resumed by the British over the question of the Shatt-al-Arab water scheme and the border question. The Kuwaiti stance was that a solution to the frontier question between Kuwait and Iraq should be a prerequisite to any settlement of the water and oil pipeline agreements. The Iraqis however wanted to use these issues as bargaining chips in the settlement of any border issue. The Umm Qasr problem remained intractable.

The Iraqis at this point were more concerned with the problems posed by Nasser. The Suez crisis had made Nasser the hero of the Arabs in the Middle East and the leader of Arab nationalism. In contrast, the Iraqi government was deeply unpopular with its domestic population partly because of its close association with Britain. The confrontation between Nasser and the British was also a confrontation with the pro-British Iraqis. The balance of power in the traditional struggle between Baghdad and Cairo had tipped dramatically in favour of Nasser and Egypt. The Iraqi government was not therefore interested in a settlement of outstanding issues with Kuwait unless substantial political or monetary capital could be gained out of it. The British strategic position in the Middle East was now even more dependent on the Baghdad Pact and

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<sup>81</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126869: Annual Reports of Territories in Persian Gulf: Annual Report for Kuwait February 20, 1957: Rothnie to Moberley.

therefore the British would have to be a lot more supportive and accommodating to the Iraqi position.

Nuri al-Said continued to call for the adherence of Kuwait to the Baghdad pact, but Sheikh Abdullah resisted such pressures. His fear was that Iraq was seeking to absorb Kuwait. Following the events of 1956 and the effects in Kuwait, Burrows cautioned against such a development. In a report commenting on British policy he wrote: "My considered view is therefore that any attempt by us to associate the Persian Gulf States in any way with the Baghdad Pact would not only be doomed to failure but would be the step most calculated to destroy our position and to drive at least Kuwait into precisely the opposite camp."<sup>82</sup> No attempt was made by Britain to persuade Kuwait to join the Baghdad Pact. Relations between Britain and Kuwait in 1957 returned to the traditional quiet diplomacy. It would be external events that would upset and change the relationship yet again in 1958.

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<sup>82</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126915: Political Relations Between States in Persian Gulf and UK: UK policy: Bahrain to Foreign Office January, 24, 1957: Burrows.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

By the end of 1957 Britain had transferred the focus of its Middle East interests from the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean to Iraq and the Gulf. This process was further accelerated by the events of 1958, particularly the revolution in Iraq. Britain's policy in the region had undergone some limited success since the Suez War. This success was due predominantly to the reinvigoration of the Anglo-American special relationship which had helped re-establish Britain's international position. Also as Paul Kennedy writes:

**It can be argued that the realities of decline were still disguised - in defence matters, by the post-1957 policy of relying upon the nuclear deterrent, which was far less expensive than large conventional forces yet suggested a continued Great Power status; and in economic matters, by the fact that Britain also shared in the general boom of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>83</sup>**

The Sandys Defence Act had re-emphasised the role of British forces in the Gulf region and paved the way for an increase in the strength of British bases there. Overall, British policy could be criticised at this point for failing to adjust to the realities of national decline. Macmillan's admission in December 1956 that Suez had been the last gasp of a declining power did not coincide well with the subsequent policy of his government. Britain had still failed to devise a coherent and integrated strategic doctrine for the region. This was predominantly due to the institutional problems in the decision and policy-making process. The strategic objectives in the Gulf were still viewed as being the maintenance of stability, keeping the Soviet Union out of the area, providing a platform for a counterstrike to the Soviet Union in time of war and acting as a territorial hurdle to any Soviet penetration of Africa and the Indian Ocean. Britain was still attempting to play a great power role. The events of 1958 would soon turn it to the more realistic aim of securing maximum financial benefit from its position in the region.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship had clearly been changed by the Suez affair. A process of change in the client-patron relationship developed. Kuwait sought more

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<sup>83</sup> Kennedy, The Rise and Fall, p. 547.

autonomy in its external relations especially with other Arab states. The blow to British power and credibility caused by the Suez War had reduced the asymmetry between Britain and Kuwait and therefore fed into a **Regulation** drive in the relationship. The increased importance of Kuwait to Britain, derived from oil, also meant that the patron had less control over its client. Despite Suez, Britain still enjoyed a unique position in the Gulf which allowed the bilateral relationships that it had with the Arab littoral states including that with Kuwait to continue.

## **Chapter 3: January to August 1958; Patron Control**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter three covers the development of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship from January to August 1958. The chapter is split into three parts. The first deals with the formation of the UAR and the Arab Union, and the second covers the revolution in Iraq. The third deals with the consequences of the developments of 1958 for the patron-client relationship.

The position of Britain in the Gulf at the beginning of 1958 was determined by a combination of past imperial ties and Cold War demands under the shadow of shattered prestige and loss of legitimacy following the Suez war. Britain still retained important bilateral relationships with Iraq and many of the Sheikdoms in the Gulf. Alongside this imperial legacy stood the Baghdad Pact, which provided the security structures required by the Cold War.

The peace of 1957 was to be contrasted with the disorder and dangers for Kuwait of the events of 1958. The problems were caused by the formation of the UAR and the revolution in Iraq, which rocked the internal position of Kuwait and its external relations with Britain and the Arab world.

### **3.2 The formation of the United Arab Republic and the Arab Union**

The issue that dominated Anglo-Kuwaiti relations from February to July 1958 was the possible adherence of Kuwait to the Arab Union. Two rival 'Unions' had been created at the beginning of 1958. The UAR was formed between Egypt and Syria and the Arab Union between Jordan and Iraq. This development had split the Arab world along the lines of the established Baghdad-Cairo (Iraq-Egypt) rivalry.<sup>1</sup> Any external power wishing to dominate the Middle East needed some purchase on these two vital states. If this was no longer possible an external power could best attempt to achieve a level of stability in the region by maintaining the balance of power between the two states.

As the Macmillan government could no longer dominate or control the area by sheer force they instead attempted to ensure the stability of the region by supporting the fragile pro-Western Arab Union. The level of support that could and should be provided to the Arab Union was a question that troubled the Foreign Office. A number of constraints hampered a clear-cut British decision. The Eastern and Arabian Departments of the Foreign Office, represented respectively by Sir Michael Wright and Sir Bernard Burrows, took opposing views. The problem for Britain consisted in reconciling two vital objectives that had become competing institutional interests.

The two objectives were the strategic security position of Britain in the region and the economic necessity of the free flow of oil at market prices. British support for Iraq in both the Baghdad Pact and the Arab Union was the necessary price for attaining the security objective. The adherence of Kuwait to the Arab Union would help in the attainment of the strategic security objective because of the political and economic benefit that it would give to Iraq. Conversely, this might lead to the loss of the independence of Kuwait, which in turn could potentially have damaged the economic security objective by placing too many cards in the hands of the Iraqis.

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Kerr, The Arab Cold War 1958-1964 A Study of Ideology in Politics (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Rather than ranking the two objectives the British government attempted to reconcile them.

The British Ambassador in Iraq, Sir Michael Wright, was quick to highlight the importance of a British policy of bringing Kuwait and Saudi Arabia or both into close co-operation with the Arab Union.<sup>2</sup> He argued that Kuwait could benefit from association with the Union and still technically remain independent. Under Article 2 of the founding treaty of the Arab Union each state would keep its international position, independence and sovereignty. From this Article it was clear that, even within the Union, Kuwait could continue to negotiate the vital border issue and demarcation of the frontier with Iraq. Article 3 of the founding treaty of the Arab Union stated that each member could keep its existing international treaties. This implied that Kuwait could continue to keep its special relationship with Britain as a member of the Union.

Difficulties did exist though with the federal parts of the agreement: unification of customs law, the armed forces and foreign policy. The lack of democratic institutions within Kuwait would also have been an impediment to its participation in the Federal Legislature. Iraq and Jordan appeared to be prepared to see Kuwait associated with the Union through a loose agreement in which Sheikh Abdullah would retain full sovereignty and maintain his special relationship with Britain while co-ordinating economic and financial policies with the Union.<sup>3</sup> The responses in London to the deliberations of Sir Michael Wright were measured and practical. Due to the complexities of the situation and the importance of the patron-client relationship with Kuwait, policy decisions were postponed to allow for ministerial considerations. The preliminary Foreign Office view was that association with the Union would hold little if any attraction for Sheikh Abdullah and the al-Sabah ruling family. However, it was recognised that endorsement and backing for the Arab Union was crucial to the maintenance of the strategic position of Britain in the Levant and the Gulf.

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<sup>2</sup> PRO: Prem 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support.

<sup>3</sup> PRO: Prem 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Baghdad to Foreign Office, February 17, 1958: Wright.



The Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Bernard Burrows, highlighted the differing views held in Iraq and Kuwait over the issue. Apart from frontier demarcation it was felt that there was nothing in the Union for Kuwait and that as the inclination of most Kuwaitis was towards Arab nationalism and the UAR there would be some domestic political danger in any imposed confederation of Kuwait within the Arab Union. Burrows and the majority of the Arabian Department believed that the best interests of Kuwait and Britain were in Kuwait not joining the union.<sup>4</sup>

The initial ministerial position taken in London was that it was desirable to bring Kuwait into a closer association with the Arab Union, but without damaging the relationship between Kuwait and Britain. Diplomats were therefore instructed by Ministers to try and help the Iraqis produce propitious conditions for an approach to be made to Sheikh Abdullah.<sup>5</sup> It was also stressed that no pressure was to be put on Sheikh Abdullah and that the British government would support him in any decision that he took. A contrasting view was held by Wright who believed that the maintenance of the Arab Union was so important to the British position in the Gulf and the Middle East that Britain should take a more pro-active policy over the Union and place pressure on Sheikh Abdullah.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of recommending confederation with the Arab Union to Kuwait was that Iraq was still regarded as a threat to the territorial integrity of Kuwait by the al-Sabah family. Also, any refusal to join the Arab Union by Kuwait would be blamed on Britain by the Iraqi government because they firmly believed that Britain controlled the decisions of Sheikh Abdullah. This was far from the truth. Since the Suez affair, British influence over the inter-Arab affairs of Kuwait had been narrow and restricted. The tangible benefits for Kuwait also seemed limited in the view of Sheikh Abdullah. This, coupled with the fear and suspicion felt towards Iraq by Kuwait, meant that

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<sup>4</sup>PRO: PREM 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Bahrain to Foreign Office, March 5, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Bahrain to Foreign Office, March 5, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Baghdad to Foreign Office, February 28, 1958: Wright.

success looked unlikely, unless the Iraqis were to conduct their diplomacy with skill. It was suggested by the Foreign Office that Iraq should make a grand gesture towards Kuwait in order to smooth the ensuing diplomatic manoeuvres.<sup>7</sup> It was put forward by British diplomats that the conciliatory move should be an unconditional offer on the demarcation of the border.

Kuwait was not the only target of Iraq and Jordan for confederation to the Arab Union. The Iraqi Foreign Affairs minister, Jamali, visited Riyadh in late February to try and secure the association of Saudi Arabia with the Arab Union. King Saud replied that he would not be joining the Union at an early date, but that he would give the Union his blessing, and if asked for advice by Sheikh Abdullah would recommend that Kuwait join the Union.<sup>8</sup> This left Kuwait and Syria as possible members of the Union. Syrian membership was only likely to come about through coercive action by Iraq. Concern was developing in both Britain and the United States that the failure of the Arab Union to gain the membership of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia would lead to a precipitating action of military intervention by Iraq and Jordan on Syria. The stakes had therefore been increased over the question of Kuwait joining the Union.

Further discussions over the Arab Union took place between Macmillan and Lloyd. It was agreed that Lloyd would, on a trip to a South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) meeting in Manila, stop off in Baghdad to discuss the issue with Nuri. The main preoccupation of this encounter was the membership or association of Kuwait with the Arab Union. At this meeting the Iraqis went further than they had before: they requested that Britain should grant Kuwait its independence in order that it might then join the alliance. Iraq at the same time would allow Kuwait to have a defence treaty with Britain guaranteeing Kuwait its independence. The Iraqis even offered to guarantee Kuwaiti oil investment in London. Lloyd, without committing the government to any course, reacted somewhat negatively to the

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<sup>7</sup> PRO: Prem 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Baghdad to Foreign Office, February 28, 1958: Wright.

<sup>8</sup> PRO: Prem 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Baghdad to Foreign Office, March 1, 1958: Wright.

suggestion. In his telegram to Macmillan he pointed out the contradictions in the Iraqi requests.

**In any event the case put to me seemed somewhat illogical. We were asked to 'declare the independence' of Kuwait and at the same time we were to order her into the Iraq/Jordan Union. Jamali [the Iraqi Foreign Minister] had spoken of the opinions of the majority of Kuwaitis. If we gave so called independence in the sense of allowing or forcing them to determine their international future they might well decide to join Egypt. <sup>9</sup>**

Confederation for Kuwait with the Arab Union on these terms would have led to the extinction of Kuwait as a separate entity. Kuwait would not have retained any semblance of 'full sovereignty' if it adhered to a Union with a federal army, a federal legislature and a federal foreign policy. Britain could hardly stand by its guarantee if the threat to Kuwait came from the federal authorities, since this could too easily be presented as interference in the internal affairs of the Union. Lloyd understood these ramifications and therefore rejected the proposal.

In private Nuri admitted to Lloyd that his government was asking for far too much. He suggested that Kuwait might do no more than join the Economic Committee of the Union, in return for which Iraq would recognise the existing frontiers with the small exception of the strip of Umm Qasr. Lloyd, stressed as clearly as possible that an offer on Kuwait's borders and status by Iraq, unconditionally, without any reneging on Umm Qasr, would be the best first step towards any sort of Kuwaiti association.

This suggestion of Kuwait's association with just the Economic Committee of the Union was a much more acceptable solution to both Kuwait and Britain. Iraq would receive funds from Kuwait. The Kuwaitis would stand outside the foreign policy and defence union, but with the security of their territory guaranteed by both Britain and Iraq. The border issue would be settled in a manner satisfactory to Kuwait while still under British protection. This would add to the security of Kuwait as it would be a

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<sup>9</sup> PRO: Prem 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Inward telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office: Following for Prime Minister from Foreign Secretary, March 8, 1958: Lloyd.

legal basis for international objections against any subsequent action by Iraq against Kuwait even after the latter became an independent member of the Arab Union.

Following Lloyd's talks in Baghdad, discussions were held by British Ministers in London. A paper was prepared at Cabinet Committee level on Kuwait and the Arab Union. Due to the overriding importance that the Iraqis had now placed upon the association of Kuwait with the Union, the Cabinet Committee had agreed to review the situation. The Iraqis seemed determined to try and offset the latest accession to the UAR by Yemen, and at the same time get access to Kuwaiti oil revenues to maintain Jordan. Clearly the dangers of pushing Sheikh Abdullah into an agreement that was against his own and his people's wishes were too much for the British. It was decided that Burrows would be instructed to inform Sheikh Abdullah that it was his decision and that no pressure would be placed upon him in the matter. Nevertheless, it remained Britain's view that the situation was critical and that unless the Arab Union became a going concern, the influence of Nasser and the UAR would extend throughout the Arab world. The consequences of this might be that Kuwait would have to choose between active protection by British troops or the loss of any separate political status.<sup>10</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah adopted a position independent of both the Arab Union and the UAR and decided to try and play a mediating role between the two groupings. He visited Iraq on May 10, 1958, for the start of a five day tour. At his meetings with the government of Iraq great pressure was placed on him to take Kuwait into the Arab Union.<sup>11</sup> These talks were always unlikely to succeed because of the lack of agreement between the two sides. The policy of the al-Sabah ruling family had always been dominated by the desire for internal autonomy and external security. The proposals of Nuri Pasha met neither of these considerations fully.

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<sup>10</sup>PRO: Prem 11/ 2403: Federation of Arab Union and Association of Kuwait with Union: UK and US Support: Paper of March 12, 1958 on Kuwait and the Arab Union.

<sup>11</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 132751: Internal Political Situation in Kuwait: Events in the Persian Gulf: Wright

The issue was of great importance to the West. This was demonstrated when the subject of Iraq, Kuwait and the Arab Union came up for discussion at the 'Macmillan Talks' held between Eisenhower and Macmillan in Washington from June 9 to June 11, 1958. The two governments recognised the difficulties that Iraq was facing both politically and financially. Nuri had informed the United States Ambassador, Gallman, that Iraq must receive substantial financial assistance and secure Kuwaiti membership of the Arab Union or he would resign. Eisenhower and Macmillan agreed to meet the Arab Union budget deficit.<sup>12</sup> Wisely, they would not agree to the request to force Kuwait into the Union. Macmillan noted that: "Nuri had been difficult for some time and was now attempting a Nasser-type operation against Kuwait. The ruler, he said, does not want to join the Arab Union and if Nuri attempts to force him it will play right into Nasser's hands." He went on further to say that: "It was a great shock to him to learn that Nuri ha[d] 'out and out threatened' Kuwait."<sup>13</sup>

Such a profound decision could not be rushed into by the Kuwaitis, but had to be approached cautiously over time and in the event the revolution in Baghdad swept away monarchical Iraq before a decision could be reached. Additional obstacles to the proposal included the growing political tensions in the Middle East, the diplomatic chicanery of Iraq, the general distrust of Iraq, and the support for Nasser of a majority of Kuwaitis. All of these encouraged procrastination by the Kuwaiti regime. The single most important reason for Kuwait's rejection of the Arab Union was the continued desire of the ruling family to remain independent. The al-Sabah regime did not reject the idea of joining the Arab Union on the advice of Britain but of its own accord. This position contradicts some of the secondary literature such as Naim Salem who writes that: "Kuwait, on the advice of the British declined to co-operate with Iraq."<sup>14</sup> Nor is it difficult to understand the decision from the point of view of a traditional dynasty in a

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<sup>12</sup> United States, "Memorandum of Conversation; Macmillan Talks Washington, June 9, 1958," Foreign Relations of the United States 7, 1958-1960, 301-302.

<sup>13</sup> United States, "Memorandum of Conversation; Macmillan Talks Washington, June 9, 1958," Foreign Relations of the United States 7, 1958-1960, 302.

<sup>14</sup> Naim Joseph Salem, "The Drama of US-Iraqi Relations: From World War II to the Gulf War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1992), p. 75.

world beset by modernisation and populism. The increased power of Nasser meant that Sheikh Abdullah risked joining the sinking ship of the Hashemite powers only to be drowned by the wave of Arab nationalism emanating from Nasser. The extent of Nasser's new powers after the formation of the UAR had important repercussions. As Elizabeth Monroe writes: "The foreign power to suffer the sharpest set-back from the extension of Nasser's power to Syria's eastern frontier was Great Britain, for the move precipitated the downfall of the pro-British clique in Iraq."<sup>15</sup> For the financial efforts made by Britain and the United States was not enough to save the Iraqi regime let alone the Arab Union. The opportunity for Kuwait and monarchical Iraq to form a reciprocal bilateral relationship consistent with Western interests and general Middle East stability was about to vanish along with the Baghdad monarchy. It is not clear that Sheikh Abdullah anticipated the revolution in Iraq but it is clear that he continued to pursue a policy that placed the security of the al-Sabah dynasty at the apex of Kuwait's national interests.

### **3.3 Middle East Crisis and its effects on Kuwait**

On July 14, 1958 two Iraqi infantry brigades under the command of two Free Officers, Abdul Qassim and Abdul Arif, entered Baghdad and took control of the key offices of the government and the monarchy. A bloody coup d'état ensued which set in motion a crisis in the Middle East that threatened to spill over into a wider world conflict.

The British Cabinet was called to emergency session in the afternoon of the 14th to discuss this situation. As the day wore on and the completeness of the revolution became apparent the government became aware that its Middle East strategy was in ruin. Iraq had been a loyal British and Western ally in the region and had acted as a counter-weight to Nasser and Egypt. Britain had important military bases on Iraqi territory and counted on Iraqi support in its strategic defence of the

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<sup>15</sup> Monroe, Britain's Moment, p. 211.

Middle East. Unfortunately, this position, which found Iraq the only Arab state in the Baghdad Pact, had left the Nuri government wide open to Arab nationalist attack and was part of the reason for the revolution. Phebe Marr rightly contends that: "The coup was unquestionably a reflection of deep-seated discontent among officers and among civilian politicians with the regime's foreign policy and its slowness to reform."<sup>16</sup> The loss of Hashemite Iraq was another large reverse for Britain's position in the Middle East doubly alarming as it followed so soon after Suez.<sup>17</sup>

The danger of Arab nationalist uprisings spreading throughout the Middle East was now the major immediate concern of Britain and the United States.<sup>18</sup> The effects of the Iraqi revolution on Kuwait and the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship was well understood and anticipated in the Foreign Office. Riches writing on July 14 was clearly correct in anticipating that Iraq would now prosecute claims to Kuwait with greater intensity.<sup>19</sup> When the coup took place Sheikh Abdullah was on his summer holiday in Damascus and his uncle Sheikh Mubarak was in place as the acting ruler. Sheikh Mubarak immediately brought the army and the security forces to a state of alert.

The British at first offered forces to help control any situation in Kuwait, but Mubarak refused them. Halford, after receiving instructions from Whitehall, pressed Mubarak further on this issue, but to no avail.<sup>20</sup> The Chiefs of Staff, because of the events in Iraq, remained extremely concerned about the protection of Kuwait. Military forces could only be sent quickly to the country if a bridgehead was secured in the Sheikhdom and the only such bridgehead would have to be the airfield at Ahmadi. Serious consideration was given by the British government to overriding the caution of Sheikh Mubarak and sending in British troops. Such action against the wishes of the

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<sup>16</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1985), p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A Fernea and William Roger Louis, eds, *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958, the Old Social Class Revisited* (London: Tauris, 1991), p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> PRO: CAB 128/ 32: Part 2. C.C (58) p.324. 1958: Cabinet Conclusions, July 14, 1958. 7.pm. 10 Downing St. Contents Middle East; Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*.

<sup>19</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132502: Effects of events in Iraq on Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Aden: Note to Sir William Hayter, on July 14, 1958: Riches.

<sup>20</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132757: Internal Political Situation in Kuwait: Persian Gulf Monthly Report for the Period July 3 - August 6, 1958: Halford.

Kuwaiti government would have been as dangerous as a full-scale operation and, if the objective was to keep the oil flowing from the refinery and port at Minat el Ahmedi, troops would have been better deployed by the sea than at an inland airport.

The British diplomats in the region believed that the al-Sabah ruling family had no idea of the possible dangers posed to their position in Kuwait. The memories of Suez fortunately had a calming effect on any head strong Ministers in London. British rights of intervention in Kuwait were not clearly defined, although it could mount a limited operation to evacuate or ensure the safety of British citizens. Even though many states assumed that Britain controlled Kuwait, the move might have been seen as an attempt to mount an operation on Basra. It was also believed that it would be almost impossible to operate the oil fields without the concurrence of the Kuwaiti government.<sup>21</sup> On July 15, 1958, Macmillan received a report on the legal aspects of any intervention in Kuwait. It was the legal view of the Foreign Office that not even a breach of the 'Exclusive Agreement' of 1899 by the ruler could justify intervention.<sup>22</sup> The only plausible excuse for intervention would be if Kuwait was threatened by invasion from another state. The report stated that: -

**If the Ruler was unwilling in the event to afford the facilities or to ensure the conditions which HM. Government regarded as necessary to ensure the defence of Kuwait against armed attack or the imminent threat of attack, legal justification could be found if HM. Government took such measures as were necessary to assure these facilities or conditions.**<sup>23</sup>

The United States government adopted a different position to the one it had taken during Suez; it was now completely behind any British move in the Gulf. It was assumed in Washington that Britain would if necessary take strong action in Kuwait to maintain its position.<sup>24</sup> The Eisenhower administration was also prepared to act to

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<sup>21</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 132757: Internal Political Situation in Kuwait: Intervention in the Lebanon. Possible Repercussions and effects in Kuwait: Minute of July 18, 1958: Sir Patrick Dean.

<sup>22</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Legal aspects of intervention in Kuwait, Eastern Department of Foreign Office, July 15, 1958.

<sup>23</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Legal aspects of intervention in Kuwait, Eastern Department of Foreign Office, July 15, 1958.

<sup>24</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Washington to Foreign Office for the attention of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, July 19, 1958: Lord Hood.



defend the ARAMCO oil fields at Dhahran if the need arose. The absolute necessity of defending the oil fields was acknowledged by both the British and the Americans. H.M. Minister to Washington, Lord Hood, wrote to Macmillan stating that: "They assume [United States government] that we will also hold Bahrain and Qatar, come what may. They argue that at all costs these oil fields must be kept in Western hands."<sup>25</sup>

The view of Lord Hood was that the government should continue its cautious policy towards Kuwait, but be prepared at a moment's notice to intervene with military force. This would entail placing a battalion in readiness at Bahrain and holding a small Royal Naval task force ready in the area. The Ministry of Defence on July 22 instructed its planning staff to be prepared for three possibilities in Kuwait: instant unopposed entry by request, an operation of entry against Kuwaiti opposition within a minimum of five days from July 22, and military action to secure Kuwait against Iraqi attack following union with the UAR by the Kuwait government.<sup>26</sup>

A special Cabinet Committee of the British government met on July 22 to co-ordinate and produce some sort of short-term policy for the Middle East. Although short term policy recommendations were the objective of this committee, consideration was given to longer term policies. It was decided that the British government would either have to accommodate Arab nationalism or continue opposition to it. In the Gulf region, opposition to Arab nationalism might entail permanent British military intervention. It was also agreed that everything possible should be done to try and ensure that the UAR did not come under Soviet domination. The long term policy objective would be to attempt to play the traditional British role of external balancer by exploiting the historical tensions and differences between Egypt and Iraq.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Washington to Foreign Office for the attention of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, July 19, 1958: Lord Hood.

<sup>26</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Minutes of Secretary of States talks with Mr. Dulles. Alternative courses of action in Kuwait, July 22, 1958: Walmsley.

<sup>27</sup> PRO: CAB 130/ 153: Gen 658. Policy in the Middle East: Meeting No. 1 July 22, 1958.

In terms of the patron-client model, British policy with Kuwait during these events continued to be guided by a **Maintenance** objective. This entailed sitting tight and appearing to accept the historically low profile of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship, but at the same time having a force ready at Bahrain to intervene in Kuwait at a moment's notice. The decision had been made that Kuwait must remain independent at all costs. Invasion by Iraq or the adherence of Kuwait to the UAR would have prompted intervention by British forces. The underlying policy of the British government remained consistent: the assured flow of oil for the West at current prices. The oil fields of the Gulf states must on no account fall into anti-Western hands.

On his return to Kuwait Sheikh Abdullah proposed a new initiative to the British government. He requested Britain to allow Kuwait to join the Arab League. His belief was that this was a way in which Kuwait could keep closer to events in the Arab world.<sup>28</sup> This, he stressed, would not change any of the agreements between Kuwait and Britain. What Sheikh Abdullah was asking for was full membership of the Arab League in order to increase the security of the al-Sabah regime and Kuwait. He was becoming increasingly convinced that the only aid that Britain could extend to Kuwait was of a military nature, but was of the opinion that such assistance would, in the long run, be counter-productive. He was therefore looking around for some other source of reassurance. This request brought the whole question of the status of Kuwait and the long term policy of Britain towards Kuwait to a head. Sheikh Abdullah in response to the revolution in Iraq and the British policy over Kuwait and the Arab Union had been moving towards a **Regulation** objective. The increased geopolitical threat from Iraq after the revolution ensured that Kuwaiti policy reverted to an **Accommodation** line.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Political Relations between Kuwait and Arab League: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 31, 1958: Halford.

<sup>29</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

### **3.4 Developments in the patron-client relationship of Britain and Kuwait**

#### **3.4.1 The changing nature of the patron-client relationship: Kuwait's moves towards a regulation objective**

Under the 1899 'Bond' Agreement, Kuwait was obligated neither to receive foreign representatives nor to alienate territory without the agreement of Britain. A number of other agreements had been signed during the long history of the relationship.<sup>30</sup> In line with patron-client theory the fabric of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship had been built up by customary and habitual practice. The view in the Foreign Office by 1958 was that British control would only last as long as Sheikh Abdullah was convinced that it was in his interests to direct his foreign relations through Britain. The desire of Sheikh Abdullah to change the relationship was therefore of concern to the Foreign Office.

The British government seemed unclear about the direction of its policy towards Kuwait and the Gulf. They wanted policy to remain vague and the position of Britain to be unchanging. In terms of patron-client theory, policy towards Kuwait was fluid and ill-defined.<sup>31</sup> The departments concerned with this issue, from the Foreign Office through to the Treasury and the Ministry of Power, at this time believed that Kuwait was of vital interest to Britain. This tended to reinforce the patron-client relationship because of the lack of institutional criticism or censure of it. At the ministerial level the position taken over the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) issue was viewed as a way of accommodating Arab nationalism, but without surrendering the position of Britain in Kuwait or the Gulf.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See pp. 48-53 of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup>See p. 19 of this thesis.

<sup>32</sup>PRO: T 236/ 5180: Persian Gulf: UK Policy: 1957-1960: Paper by the Foreign Secretary on Kuwait-International Relations C (58) 228. Lloyd. This episode is described in 3.4.1.d.

Concern was expressed by Sir Bernard Burrows over any change in relationship between Kuwait and Britain.<sup>33</sup> He felt that Britain would not be able to persuade the Sheikh Abdullah to enter into a new sort of treaty arrangement. In a report on British policy he wrote:

**The virtues of the present arrangement for Kuwait are its rather vague and flexible character and the fact that no one alive was responsible for entering into it. The negotiation of any new arrangement would arouse intense controversy and propaganda and I would expect the Ruler to say that if we were withdrawing our protection he must seek it somewhere else, e.g. from the Arab League or the Egyptian-Syrian Union.** <sup>34</sup>

The emphasis on a greater degree of external autonomy for Kuwait was a clear **Regulation** objective for the Kuwaiti regime. Pressure to change the relations of Kuwait with Britain and the outside world also came from four directions. First, externally from Egypt and Iraq; second, internally from the domestic changes in Kuwait; third, from the changing nature of the international economic environment; and fourth, from Sheikh Abdullah himself.

#### **3.4.1.a External pressures from Egypt and Iraq on the patron-client relationship**

The al-Sabah family were conscious of the support that Arab nationalism enjoyed in Kuwait and therefore the deference that had to be shown to some of the views of Nasser and Radio Cairo. On Arab issues Sheikh Abdullah wanted Kuwait to be viewed as conforming with the majority Arab viewpoint. He was therefore keen that Kuwait should be as fully as possible in line with the Arab League on the boycott of Israel. The strength that Arab nationalism enjoyed in the region also meant that the al-Sabah regime was careful not to be seen to be too close to Britain. This situation had arisen from the Suez War. Elie Podeh writes: "As a consequence of the Suez War, Britain's allies in the Arab world found themselves in an extremely difficult position: not only had a Western power attacked a sister Arab state, but the attack was carried

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<sup>33</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Bahrain to Foreign Office, March 15, 1958: Burrows.

<sup>34</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy towards and influence in Kuwait: Bahrain to Foreign Office, March 15, 1958: Burrows.

out in collusion with their arch-enemy - Israel."<sup>35</sup> This was not to say that the ruling family did not share a high degree of loyalty and affinity with their patron, but that this relationship was best kept secret. Interestingly, this policy of downplaying the patron relationship does not fit in with the theory of patron-client relations of Shoemaker and Spanier. They characterise one of the elements of the patron-client relationship as being defined by the perception of the other actors and that it has to be clear to the other actors that the patron and client are bound tightly together.<sup>36</sup> Although it was clear that Britain and Kuwait were in fact closely bound together, the unpopularity of Britain after Suez made any public manifestation of the association dangerous.<sup>37</sup>

The contiguity of Iraq and Kuwait and the historical claim made by Iraq on Kuwait ensured that political developments in Iraq would have a direct bearing on the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. From January to May 1958 the pressure exerted on Kuwait by Iraq to join the Arab Union acted as a regulating force for the Kuwaitis on the patron-client relationship. The threat made by Nuri to Sheikh Abdullah acted as a force for **Reinforcement** of the relationship with Britain. The revolution in Iraq in July 1958 clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of Kuwait to the regional political environment. This reinforced the vulnerability of Kuwait's security and the need to remain close to its patron, Britain.<sup>38</sup>

#### **3.4.1.b Internal reforms in Kuwait affecting the patron-client relationship**

During 1958 a number of internal reforms took place that had a bearing on the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. These changes were consistent with pursuit of an **Accommodation** objective of the government, that is, they acted to both increase and restrict relations between Kuwait and Britain. These changes included reforms to the democratic structures, government organisations, newspapers, the airlines, finance, trade and investment.

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<sup>35</sup> Pobeh, "The Struggle", p. 97.

<sup>36</sup> Shoemaker and Spanier, *Patron-Client*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> See p. 67 of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

The formation of a number of advisory councils to government departments took place during 1958. These councils went some way to accommodate the aspirations of the people of Kuwait for participation in local government. These measures still did not satisfy the so-called 'politically conscious', who called for free elections to the Councils and demanded that the Sheikhs running the departments should be bound by the views of the majority on the advisory councils. Sheikh Abdullah nominated a body of responsible citizens to the electoral college that on March 28 elected fifty-six full and eighteen alternative candidates for seats on the governmental committees. On May 3 he struck two names off the list. In protest at this move the rest of the elected committee stood down and the scheme was abandoned. The lack of internal political development in Kuwait was partly due to the historical nature of the client-patron relationship.<sup>39</sup> This tie had given the al-Sabah family a high degree of political autonomy because they had not had to rely on internal political groupings for their position. The massive rise in oil wealth had further increased the independence of the ruling family.<sup>40</sup>

During the Suez crisis, Sheikh Abdullah had promised to give greater freedom to the press. At the beginning of the year The Dawn joined The People as a new newspaper. This paper followed the themes of Arab nationalism and anti-Westernism throughout the year. The Kuwait Oil Company came in for particular criticism from the new liberal press. The verbal and written attacks never amounted to much in Kuwait for, as Halford pointed out in his annual report: "Kuwaitis are still too busy making money to have much time for local politics."<sup>41</sup> The press still acted in the interests of the al-Sabah family. Little criticism of the ruling family appeared in the papers, but the adverse comment against the British by the papers was a useful way for the ruling family to indirectly express criticism of their patron ally.

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<sup>39</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", pp. 568-569.

<sup>40</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", p. 578; Crystal, "Coalitions in Oil Monarchies", pp. 427-43.

<sup>41</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 140064: Persian Gulf States: annual review: Kuwait, January 6, 1959: Halford.

Kuwait also sought a measure of autonomy by establishing an official national airline that would eventually fly long haul flights to London and Bombay. A civil aviation agreement between Kuwait and Britain had been reached in 1956. The United Kingdom-Kuwait Air Agreement of 1956, in line with the general position of Britain being responsible for Kuwait's external relations, allowed for Britain to conduct the bulk of the air traffic of Kuwait.<sup>42</sup> After some considerable negotiation an eventual agreement was signed between the Board of Kuwait Airways and the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC). This agreement gave BOAC commercial and operational control of a new Kuwait Airways in return for which BOAC agreed to guarantee an annual payment to Kuwait Airways of Rs.300,000, with any profits after this being shared. BOAC would also supply the first plane to Kuwait Airways, a Viscount, and in time a second one. It was seen by both the British and the Kuwaitis that the success of the civil aviation plan would add a great deal to the general British position in Kuwait.<sup>43</sup> This agreement therefore met an **Accommodation** objective because it reinforced the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship as well as increasing the independence of Kuwait.

#### **3.4.1.c The affect of the changing nature of the economic environment of Kuwait on the patron-client relationship**

The wealth of Kuwait was rapidly increasing during this time. The British government had mixed reactions towards this particular development. Sheikh Abdullah continued to pursue a policy of investing a large proportion of his oil royalties in sterling deposits. Officials at the Treasury were anxious that these sterling deposits should not be put in jeopardy and were therefore concerned at any development that might knock Sheikh Abdullah's confidence in the advice or support of Britain. The effect of the increase in wealth for Kuwait on the client-patron relationship was to

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<sup>42</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 140064: Persian Gulf States: annual review: Kuwait, January 6, 1959: Halford.

<sup>43</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132751 : Events in Persian Gulf: Kuwait: Diary No. 5 April 29 to May 18, 1958: Civil Aviation.

increase their independence and room for manoeuvre. From Table 1.2 it is clear that a client can pursue either a **Regulation** or a **Maintenance** objective when its economy is relatively strong. These objectives will be modified in accordance with the degree of security of the client.<sup>44</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah had set up an investment board in London in 1953 to deal with his finances. The chairman of this board was a Mr. Kemp with Lord Percy and Lord Kennet as the other members. Formal procedural rules were set out for the investment of funds. These stipulated that the investment could only be in securities guaranteed by the British government, had to attain a higher return than was available from fixed deposits, and should be readily realisable. These procedures were changed somewhat to allow the investment board to buy a few equities. Despite this, the main policy remained the maintenance of so called 'maximum liquidity'.<sup>45</sup> This high level of liquidity ensured that the ruling family had maximum flexibility and manoeuvre with the funds that could in the event of crisis be moved quickly. However, this was seen as a short-term liability by both the Bank of England and the Treasury.

The effects of Kuwait either leaving the Sterling Area, or converting its income into dollars when sterling was made convertible had already concerned the Treasury as long ago as July 1955.<sup>46</sup> The Sterling Area membership of Kuwait and Qatar was even more important to the Treasury than that of Iraq. Sir Anthony Parsons writes that at the time of the British intervention in Kuwait in 1961: "The Emir of Kuwait held one-third of the total sterling reserves."<sup>47</sup>

The problem for the Treasury was that as long as the balances attained such a high degree of liquidity they constituted a clear threat to the stability of sterling. Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s devaluation was the real fear of British

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<sup>44</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> PRO: T 236/ 4293: Persian Gulf: Financial and Economic Problems Arising from Increased Oil Revenues: Note Treasury, July 19, 1956: Cobbold; Special Report Series No.8, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> PRO: T 236/ 3893: Sterling area membership of certain Middle East Countries following convertibility of Sterling.

<sup>47</sup> Sir Anthony Parsons, "Gulf Withdrawal: British Withdrawal from the Gulf 1965-1971", Contemporary Record, (Summer, 1988), p. 41.



governments.<sup>48</sup>The advantage of the large Kuwaiti deposits held in London was that it helped to offset any withdrawals of sterling funds by other states. Any large scale withdrawal would undermine the stability of sterling and could lead to an increase in domestic interest rates. The Treasury viewed retention of Sheikh Abdullah's sterling deposits as an important British policy. A collateral aim of the Treasury was that these funds should be invested in such a way as not to excite criticism of Kuwait from other Middle East states.

Both governments were sensitive to criticism that 'the wealth of Sheikh Abdullah was being used for the benefit of Britain and not the Arab world'.<sup>49</sup>Concern was expressed by the Eden government, following cancellation of the finance for the Aswan Dam, that Egypt might place pressure on Kuwait to help fund the development.<sup>50</sup>The Macmillan government believed that one of the objectives of Nasser was to obtain access to the oil money of the Gulf oil states. Care was therefore taken to try and deflect any criticism of these deposits by promoting a certain amount of investment in the Gulf area. To this end, the government developed a policy on investment and trade in the Gulf and the Middle East with the Federation of British Industry (F.B.I.).

Kuwait was an important area for trade and investment by British business. In 1954 import figures for Kuwait showed that of goods with a total value of some 398 million rupees, 109 million worth came from Britain.<sup>51</sup>The Macmillan government worked in tandem with the F.B.I. through the Board of Trade and the Treasury on its Middle East economic activities and policy. In a letter to Sir Leslie Rowan at the Treasury the Middle East Committee of the F.B.I. commented that: "The Treasury and Her Majesty's Government in general are very anxious that we should export as much

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<sup>48</sup> Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 209.

<sup>49</sup> PRO: T 236/ 4293: Persian Gulf: Financial and Economic Problems Arising from Increased Oil Revenues.

<sup>50</sup> PRO: T 236/ 4293: Persian Gulf: Financial and Economic Problems Arising from Increased Oil Revenue: Bahrain to Foreign Office, August 14, 1956: Burrows.

<sup>51</sup> MRC: MSS 200/ F/ 3/ 05/ 3/ 2 Middle East: F.B.I. Middle East Panel, Minutes and Related Papers; Correspondence, January 1956 to February 1957.

as possible to Middle East countries, so as to mop up as much as possible the money for which they are getting for oil."<sup>52</sup>In a meeting on January 30, 1958, the Middle East Committee of the F.B.I. discussed the position of Kuwait. The conclusion was that there were considerable drawbacks in having the large amounts of money that Kuwait had invested in Britain because of what would happen if the deposits were removed.<sup>53</sup>

In February 1958 the British government set up the Advisory Committee on Middle East Trade (ACMET). This organisation was set up to promote British business in the Middle East. It was seen as similar to the Dollar Export Council, but with the important differentiation that ACMET had both government and businessmen among its members. Twelve businessmen, along with Ministers from the Treasury, Foreign Office and the Board of Trade, made up the organisation, with the secretariat being provided maintained by the Board of Trade. The activities of this group included trying to get a greater number of British firms interested in trading in the area, along with promotional and information activities.<sup>54</sup>The Kuwaiti market amounted to about £40m every year.<sup>55</sup>The share of world trade held by Britain continued to slip during this period, as it had to deal in an ever more competitive market. Therefore important markets such as the Middle East had to be fostered and built on. The bulk of British business in Kuwait had been related to the lucrative area of the development programme. British firms had been contracted to build or consult on the public building programme. The consumer goods market was also very profitable because of the huge demand from a very small wealthy populace.

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<sup>52</sup>MRC: MSS.200/ F/ 3/ 02/ 1/ 10 Middle East: F.B.I. Middle East Committee: Correspondence and Memoranda, July 1957 to November 1959: Letter from F.B.I. to Sir Leslie Rowan, The Treasury July 10, 1957.

<sup>53</sup> MRC: MSS.200/ F/ 3/ 02/ 1/10 Middle East: F.B.I. Middle East Committee: Note on Luncheon Meeting of January 30, 1958, on study group for the Middle East: Statement on Kuwait's surplus earnings: Sir Edmund Hall-Patch.

<sup>54</sup> MRC: MSS.200/ F/ 3/ 02/ 10 Middle East: F.B.I. Middle East Committee: Minutes of the Twenty First Meeting of the F.B.I. Middle East Committee, July 30, 1958: Item 2 ACMET.

<sup>55</sup> MRC: MSS.200/ F/ 3/ 05/ 3/ 29: Persian Gulf Enquiries, January 1954 to December 1957: Overseas Trade section, October 14, 1957: "New Market of Kuwait Offers Attractive Opportunities to United Kingdom Exporters": Commercial Officer at HM Political Agency Kuwait.

These trade and financial benefits formed part of the reciprocal nature of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship for Britain. They were also a measure of the growing control of the client over the patron. The expansion in wealth of Kuwait, combined with the increased economic dependence of Britain on the country, meant that the patron-client relationship was much less hierarchical. The asymmetry of power and resources between Britain and Kuwait was now only in the diplomatic and military fields.

#### **3.4.1.d The movement for change from Sheikh Abdullah**

The changing situation in the Middle East and the episode with Iraq over the Arab Union provoked Sheikh Abdullah to seek **Regulation** of the client-patron relationship with Britain and take greater charge of his relationships with Kuwait's Arab neighbours. The economic prosperity of Kuwait allowed Sheikh Abdullah to pursue this policy for his country. However, the new security threat emanating from Baghdad soon tempered any **Regulation** motives of Sheikh Abdullah and pushed his regime back towards an **Accommodation** goal.<sup>56</sup> This goal brought together the competing aims of increasing and restricting relations with the patron. As client-patron theory would suggest this **Accommodation** objective was a mixture of the **Reinforcement** and **Regulation** objectives.

Sheikh Abdullah placed pressure on Britain to put forward the candidature of Kuwait for full membership of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and as such had made Britain redefine in writing the extent of its responsibilities for the foreign relations of Kuwait since full membership of this international organisation from 1947 had been restricted to "sovereign" countries. Associate membership was granted to any state or territory not fully responsible for the conduct of its own international relations. Sheikh Abdullah rejected the designation of Kuwait as an associate. It was therefore difficult for Britain to declare that Kuwait fulfilled the

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<sup>56</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

obligations for full membership of the ITU unless they declared that Kuwait was "fully responsible for the conduct of its [own] international relations."

Ironically, it had been the British government who had originally insisted that new admissions to the ITU satisfied the full sovereignty requirements. Up to this point, Britain had followed a consistent policy of insisting that only completely independent States could become eligible for full membership of certain specialised agencies of the United Nations. It would therefore be difficult for Britain to put forward Kuwait to the ITU without changing the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. The Foreign Office was sensitive to the strength of feeling from Sheikh Abdullah on this issue and were aware that the relationship could be terminated by him at any time. Any statement to the effect that Kuwait was responsible for its own foreign relations would be a major change in the patron-client relationship. Such a change would also have had a direct bearing on the position of Britain in the Gulf.<sup>57</sup> The policy decision was made at ministerial level and, in due course, the Political Agent Aubrey Halford was instructed to inform Sheikh Abdullah that Britain was not in principle against the idea of Kuwait joining the ITU. At the same time, Halford was also instructed to explain the difficulties of such a move.

The economic development in Kuwait was also projecting the Sheikhdom into the various international organisations responsible for the regulation of trade. An example of this was the purchase by the Kuwait government of its first tanker from Japan. This meant that there was a need for Kuwait to adhere to the world's maritime conventions. Sheikh Abdullah was also enthusiastic for Kuwait to join the external postal service and the wireless and telegraphic communications international bodies.

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<sup>57</sup> PRO: T 236/ 5180: Persian Gulf: UK Policy: The Problem of Her Majesty's Government's Relations with the Ruler of Kuwait, March 28, 1958: Walmsley.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Developments in the first part of 1958 placed considerable strain on the patron-client relationship of Britain and Kuwait. The importance of Kuwait to Britain ensured that the Foreign Office was overtly sensitive towards the sensibilities of Kuwait. This had been demonstrated earlier in 1958 when Britain had discussed the change of its representation in Kuwait. Up to this point, the senior British diplomatic representative in the Gulf had been the Political Resident based at Bahrain. The Political Agent in Kuwait was his deputy. The suggestion was to promote British representation in Kuwait to Ambassadorial level to reflect the growing significance of Kuwait to Britain. This issue had been discussed a number of times before.<sup>58</sup> The old style Political Resident and Political Agent were left-overs from the Indian Raj. Changing this form of representation was a way for the British government to indicate its continued commitment to Kuwait as well as its new sensitivities over past colonial connotations. The problem was that any change in the Resident-Agent arrangement would produce speculation in Arab nationalist quarters about the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. The most important consideration for Britain on this rather minor issue remained the conservative inclinations of Sheikh Abdullah. His cautious attitudes meant that any changes in relations between Britain and Kuwait would take place over a long rather than a short period of time.

Another example of the sensitivity of Britain to Kuwait was the proposed trip by the Secretary of State, Selwyn Lloyd, to Kuwait. This visit, which had been planned for the outward leg of Lloyd's trip to Manila, was vetoed on the grounds that it would be regarded as putting pressure on Sheikh Abdullah to join the Arab Union. It was felt that such a move would precipitate an outpouring of public disaffection toward the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. The British view of Sheikh Abdullah's attitude towards changing his exterior relations was summed up by Halford in Kuwait in his Annual

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<sup>58</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: UK Policy Towards and Influence in Kuwait: Appendix A, Kuwait: The Possible Separation of British Representation from the Political Resident in Bahrain, and the possible change of title, January 1, 1958.

Report of 1958. He wrote: "They are a little like the Uppsala Kings who, according to an old Icelandic Saga, 'wished their country to be as quiet as Sweden had been of old, and gratified mischief makers and foreigners just so far as became needful to buy themselves peace, and nothing beyond'."<sup>59</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah was intent on pursuing policies that retained his internal autonomy and the external security of Kuwait. The pursuit of these two objectives entailed the internal development of Kuwait and **Accommodation** in the patron-client relationship with Britain. This pursuit of **Accommodation** was caused by a simultaneous desire both to limit and to reinforce the patron-client relationship. The limitation objective developed from the economic prosperity of Kuwait whilst the reinforcing objective came from the insecurity caused by the revolution in Iraq.

The commitment of the Macmillan government to a substantial strategic posture in the region was made untenable by the revolution in Iraq. This left the declining patron power (Britain) able to pursue only its economic objectives and also made Kuwait its most important remaining bilateral relationship in the Middle East.

The crux of Anglo-Kuwaiti relations in 1958 had been the Arab Union issue. Britain had lost some credibility with its client over this, and much diplomatic activity had to be mustered to repair the damage done. Out of the revolution in Iraq and the Arab Union issue sprung the movement for further change in the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. Despite Britain's scrupulous avoidance of pressure on Sheikh Abdullah to join the Arab Union, its credibility suffered a knock over the issue because it did not come out fully against the idea of Kuwait joining the Union.

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<sup>59</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 140064: Persian Gulf States: annual review for 1958: Kuwait, January 6, 1959: Halford.

## **Chapter 4: Changing Fortunes; the Power of Oil**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter 4 is divided into three sections. The first deals with British policy in the Middle East and the Gulf from August 1958 to May 1961. The second reviews security and political aspects of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. The third examines the economics of the relationship. By this point Kuwait had become the most important concern of Britain both in the Gulf and the wider Middle East. In addition, the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship was undergoing evolutionary changes determined by the wealth from oil and the formation of OPEC. Both these themes inform the whole of the chapter.

### **4.2 British Policy in the Middle East and the Gulf**

In January 1959 the Chiefs of Staff (CoS) met to discuss British policy in the Middle East. The committee had before it a report from the Joint Planning Staff that explained the revised paper, 'Middle East Policy', produced by the Official Committee on the Middle East. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Francis Festing, disagreed with the general trend of this report, which offered a choice between "switching our support from our present friends to the UAR on the one hand, and complete disengagement on the other."<sup>1</sup> His view, shared by the rest of the CoS, was that each British commitment in the Middle East should be judged on its own merits and that no commitment need be made in advance to either of the two courses of action. The CoS believed that the report was too pessimistic and put too much emphasis upon disengagement. They commented that "military intervention must be recognised as a potent means of maintaining our position; it might, in some areas, be regarded as the first remedy for a deteriorating situation, and not as a last resort."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PRO: DEFE 4/ 115: Chiefs of Staff (59) 4: Meeting January 13, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> PRO: DEFE 4/ 115: Chiefs of Staff (59) 4: Meeting January 13, 1959.

Adequate military facilities were needed so that this policy might be continued. Bases in Cyprus, the Gulf, and Aden would have to be maintained so that a quick response could be made by British forces to any perceived threat. It was anticipated that military action might have to be taken in either Kuwait, Libya or Iran. The threat to each of these states was seen to emanate from Iraq, the UAR and the Soviet Union respectively. The Chief of Navy Staff, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, believed there was a need for both political and military actions to be taken in these vulnerable states in order to shore up their defensive and security positions. He stressed the need for an increase in propaganda and education to counter the effects of UAR active propaganda. It was therefore agreed that the option of military intervention had to be retained and that the continued maintenance of the Anglo-American alignment was crucial for these ends.<sup>3</sup> This was a key decision especially because of the bearing that it had on the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship.

The restrictions on staging and overflight rights experienced by the British during the Suez crisis of 1956 had a continued bearing on British defence and foreign policy in the Middle East, and on the decision to continue a military presence in the Gulf. A recurring theme for policy makers was the need to deal with the problem of the reliability of overflying and sea routes.

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough critique and examination of the legal constraints of intervention see: Neil Macfarlane, "Intervention and Regional Security", *Adelphi Paper* 196 (London: IISS, 1985), p. 23.



Balfour Paul assesses the position accurately.

**The Suez affair, the closure of the Canal and the erection thereafter of an air barrier by Arab states from Syria to the Sudan strengthened the argument of the Services that Britain's peacekeeping responsibilities entailed the deployment of army troops and of naval units the other side of the barrier. Between 1957 and 1959 developments in Oman, the Yemen, Jordan and further afield, all requiring British military attention, endorsed the recognition shared by [Dennis] Healey, that overseas commitments were likely to increase rather than the reverse while empire in the old sense shrank. For such purposes the old reliance on UK based air mobility was no substitute for troops on the ground. Thus the role of the selected bases expanded in Service terms.<sup>4</sup>**

One need was for tiny air and sea bases that were inconspicuously placed and immune from politics, like Gan and the Cocos Islands.<sup>5</sup>Expenditure on the three major bases 'East of Suez', Mombassa, Singapore and Aden, was increased. Forward facilities at Bahrain and Sharjah were extended because of the need to allow the 'teeth' forces to be made more mobile and better equipped. The decision to increase expenditure on these bases was a clear signal of the continued commitment of the British military establishment and the government to a British role East of Suez.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, this continued financial and military commitment did not cause much, if any, dissension amongst the domestic political establishment. Concern had been expressed though, by some Conservative back-benchers, over the direction of British Middle East policy. Their worries centred upon press reports inspired by rumours in the Middle East that the British government was supporting Nasser against the dangerous excesses of Communism now dominant in Iraq.<sup>7</sup>The British government was having to play a delicate balancing act, neither supporting Communism nor appearing pro-Nasser and undermining the Qassim regime in Iraq whom they still believed to be a moderate force. The Foreign Office line was not being expounded

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<sup>4</sup> Glen Balfour-Paul, The End of Empire in the Middle East, Britain's Relinquishment of Power in her last three Arab Dependencies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 144-145.

<sup>5</sup> John Gallagher, The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire, the Ford Lectures and other Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> Kuniholm, The Persian Gulf, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 141831: UK policy in the Middle East: John Biggs Davison to Lloyd, December 18, 1958.

clearly enough. Lloyd was keen to dispel the fears of the Conservative MPs. He wrote that Britain was not going pro-Nasser, but that the government recognised the need to settle the outstanding financial business with Egypt left over from the Suez War. Lloyd believed that a struggle for control of Iraq was still going on between the pro-Egyptians and the Communists, and therefore support needed to be given to Qassim to help him stay away from the influence of Moscow.<sup>8</sup> Qassim was in fact attempting to develop his own Iraqi nationalist style that was independent of both Nasserites and the Communists. Unfortunately, he was having to rely increasingly on the support of the Communists in order to counter the Nasserite elements within Iraq. The Foreign Office which was trying to play a balancing act between the two factions, was therefore concerned when it appeared that British policy had switched to being either pro-Nasser or pro-Communist.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of most concern for Britain in the Gulf was the Iraqi threat to Kuwait. It was agreed in Whitehall that efforts would be made with the Americans to co-ordinate a joint approach on this matter.<sup>10</sup> The line taken on this issue was bound up with British policy towards the whole of the Gulf. Notes on British policy were submitted to Ministers in preparation for a Foreign Affairs debate scheduled for early November 1958. Ministers were worried that it might be claimed that the position of Britain in the Gulf was outdated and that it was not in the national interest to back up feudal and anachronistic regimes there.<sup>11</sup> The counter arguments of the Foreign Office were that the relationships that Britain had in the Gulf were beneficial to both Britain and the Gulf States and that since Britain had no rights of internal administration in any of these states it could not be held responsible for the character of government there even though the British government had at times intervened internally in the Sheikhdoms. Yet behind these arguments the underlying reason for the continued

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<sup>8</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 141831: UK Policy in the Middle East: Lloyd to Davison, December 29, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 141831: UK Policy in the Middle East, Trevelyan to Stevens, January 22, 1959.

<sup>10</sup> PRO: DEFE 4/ 115: JPS (59) 4: Policy Report January 9, 1959.

<sup>11</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 140048: Submission for Foreign Affairs Debate: Beaumont, October 28, 1959.

British presence in the Gulf was the security of its oil and financial interests in Kuwait. The relationship that Britain had enjoyed with Iraq had allowed London to disguise its vital interests in the Gulf under the blanket of strategic Cold War commitments. It was doubtful if British interests could any longer be so disguised following the Iraqi revolution. Policies that had been rejected early in 1958 were now being forced upon policy makers. Before the Iraqi revolution the majority view in the Foreign Office was that Britain could remain indefinitely in the Gulf region. This assumption, quite rightly, was now beginning to be seriously questioned.

The Colonial-Imperial tag that was pinned to the British position in the Gulf left Britain and its close allies in the Gulf wide open to attack by the Arab nationalists. As long as the British were identified with the Gulf rulers their position would be subject to criticism from liberal and nationalist opinion in the Middle East. The fear in Whitehall was that the British position would become untenable in the Gulf when, or if, the old rulers of the Sheikhdoms were removed.<sup>12</sup> The security of the Sheikhs rested primarily on the stability of the Gulf and the security relationships that their states had with Britain. The key to the success or failure of British policy in the Gulf had therefore been the forbearance of Iraq and Iran and the stability of Saudi Arabia. The revolution in Iraq now added a new destabilising element to the Gulf.

Analysis of the Iraqi threats to the Gulf produces a number of conclusions on interstate conflict. The threat perception and the activation of disputes is a function of the nature of the interacting regimes. A radical change in regime, as observed in Iraq in 1958 and in Iran from 1979-1980, can lead to disputes over norms, values and policies that can destabilise the system.<sup>13</sup>

The most important element in the ability of Britain to guarantee the security of Kuwait was the growing United States interest in the Gulf. The stability and forbearance of Iran and Saudi Arabia was primarily due to the close relationship that

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<sup>12</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 143071: Planning for the Persian Gulf: Report by R.W.L. Wilding, June 3, 1959.

<sup>13</sup> Litwak, *Security*, p. 94.

these two states enjoyed with the United States.<sup>14</sup> The objectives of the United States government for the Near Eastern and South Asian region were explained to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by the Assistant Secretary of State William M. Roundtree, on May 14, 1959. His statement concluded that United States policy was:

**First, to support the development of strong and independent nations able and willing to resist the subversive efforts of international communism; second, to contribute, if required by the nations of the area to their security, recognizing that, in a broad sense, their security is our security; third, to assist and encourage the countries of the area to resolve their disputes in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; fourth, to contribute to the economic progress and development of the nations of the Near East and South Asia.**<sup>15</sup>

The United States was clearly taking over the role of Britain in the region. The objectives of the United States in the Gulf were a mixture of ideological goals, international solidarity and strategic advantage. In contrast to this, the goals of Britain at this stage were primarily financial. The Assistant United States Secretary of Defence and Director of Near East, South Asia and Africa Region, Admiral Grantham, underlined the importance of Iran to the United States in a statement to the Senate on the Security Act. He pronounced that Iran was "obviously essential to the maintenance of our whole Near East position" and that the United States should "use every possible means to bolster her defensive capabilities and assure her continued firm alignment to the West and her effective contribution to the Baghdad Pact."<sup>16</sup> The decline in power of Britain left the British government seeking economic rather than strategic goals in the Gulf. Their ability to do this was due to the new role taken in the Gulf by the United States.

The problem for Britain remained how to maintain its vital interests in the Gulf. Should Britain remain loyal to the local rulers in the hope of riding out the storm of

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<sup>14</sup> C.C. Fishburne, Jr., "United States Policy Towards Iran, 1959-1963", (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> United States, Congress, Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, The Mutual Security Act of 1959, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959, p. 578.

<sup>16</sup> United States, Congress, Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, The Mutual Security Act of 1959, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959, p. 594.

Arab nationalism sweeping the Middle East or should contact be made and friendship sought with the local opposition in the anticipation of their coming to power? Rightly, it was decided that the latter was not an option for Britain. In a report on the Gulf a Foreign Office official wrote: "If we tried to ride two horses by befriending the local opposition, we should fall between the two. The Rulers would reinsure with whoever would defend their own position, and Nasser could always outbid us for the favour of the malcontents."<sup>17</sup> Federation of the Sheikhdoms appeared to be an impractical solution because of the conservative, parochial and mutually hostile disposition of the rulers in the Gulf (although the eventual formation of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) somewhat belied this position). Pushing the Sheikhdoms towards closer association with the Baghdad Pact - CENTO was also not the answer. It was calculated that such a policy would send Kuwait into the arms of the UAR and the rest of the Sheikhdoms towards Saudi Arabia.

The Sheikhs continued to wish for a quiet life, little troubled by the international scene. Unfortunately, they faced a hostile and changing world that threatened their position. They would therefore desire to maintain their relationship with the British as long as Britain could protect their families and give them a measure of security from the outside world. Neither cosmetic revisions of the Sheikhdoms' constitutions, moves toward federation between them, changes in treaty relations with Britain, nor any combination of the three would hide the relationship that Britain had with the Sheikhdoms.

Did any of this actually matter? Could Britain not retain its position in the Gulf indefinitely or for some considerable time? There were various views within the Foreign Office, with Burrows and Riches believing that the position could be maintained. Stevens was less sure. However it was generally accepted that if Britain's position was to become untenable, then the policy should be to retire from the scene gracefully. Unfortunately, it was unclear what the future would hold. The decision was

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<sup>17</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 143071: Planning for the Persian Gulf: Report by R.W.L. Wilding, June 3, 1959.

therefore taken to remain in the region as long as possible. A planning report on the Gulf outlined these conclusions.

**It is difficult not to agree with the conclusion that we must carry on in much the same way as before, making such progress as we safely can towards the modernisation of the regimes in the Gulf, closer relations between the Rulers and an accommodation between the Rulers and their larger neighbours.<sup>18</sup>**

As far as the larger neighbours were concerned the balance of power in the Arab cold war between Egypt and Iraq shaped the system. The Baghdad-Cairo rivalry actually strengthened the position of Britain and the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. Yet this was less a coherent planned strategy of divide and rule, but more that of pragmatic British response to the realities of the region.<sup>19</sup>

It had now become clear that Kuwait was the major concern of Britain not just in the Gulf but in the wider Middle East. The decisions taken to continue military support in the Gulf and to follow a status quo policy were primarily linked to the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship.

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<sup>18</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 143071: Planning for the Persian Gulf: Report by R.W.L. Wilding, June 3, 1959.

<sup>19</sup> Balfour-Paul, The End of Empire, p. 103.

### **4.3 Anglo-Kuwaiti relations from July 1958 to May 1961**

#### **4.3.1 The security of Kuwait and the changing nature of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship**

The revolution in Iraq caused concern in Britain about the security of Kuwait. The first impressions formed in the Foreign Office about the implications of the Iraqi revolution for Kuwait proved accurate in the long term. The head of the Eastern Department, Derek Riches wrote that:

**She would [the new regime in Iraq] prosecute the Iraqi claim to Kuwait with greater vigour than the previous Iraqi Government. . . The Iraqi attitude to Kuwait should have the indirect effect of worsening relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. . . In any event the British connection with Kuwait will be under Iraqi as well as Egyptian fire.<sup>20</sup>**

The revolution in Iraq represented the end of a period of relative security that Kuwait had enjoyed since the end of the Second World War. Traditional definitions of security have been based on the ability of a state to deter attack on its interests from other states through the sufficient possession of military power to wage war.<sup>21</sup> Kuwait had only been able to attain this security with the help of the client-patron relationship that it had with Britain. Kuwait could be characterised as a small weak power in the international system rather than a weak state. Buzan clearly defines the two when he writes that "weak or strong states will refer to the degree of socio-political cohesion; weak or strong powers will refer to the traditional distinction among states in respect of their military and economic capability in relation to each other."<sup>22</sup> Robert Rothstein's definition of a small power amply describes Kuwait's position. He writes: "A small power is a state which recognizes that it can not obtain security primarily by use of its

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<sup>20</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132502: Events in Iraq in relation to the Eastern Department: Countries of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iran: Riches to Sir William Hayter, July 14, 1958.

<sup>21</sup> Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", p. 566.

own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so."<sup>23</sup>

Kuwait was now threatened by internal insecurity as well as external aggression. Unfortunately, British policy in the Middle East over the preceding two years, especially over Suez and the question of the adherence of Kuwait to the Arab Union, had produced doubts for the Kuwaitis over this security relationship. The nature of the relationship between Kuwait and Britain therefore became the central issue between the two states over the next few months.

The Communist threat from Iraq also worried Sheikh Abdullah. He believed that Iraq had gone totally Communist and that this further threatened the security of Kuwait. There were a number of Iraqis in Kuwait, some of whom were believed to be Communists. Control or restraint of these individuals was difficult because Sheikh Abdullah feared that any action he might take could provoke a move on Kuwait by Iraq. Four Iraqi army officers had entered Kuwait to deal with issues affecting Iraqis in Kuwait. Permission had not been granted for this by Sheikh Abdullah or the British. The concern was that Iraq was attempting to open a de facto consulate in Kuwait.

The immediate concern for the British was that the instability in Iraq would spread to the Gulf region and threaten the vital oil interests there before a new political accommodation could be built with nationalist forces in the region.<sup>24</sup> Britain pressed Sheikh Abdullah to allow a build up of military forces in the Sheikhdom, but the ruler rejected such calls reiterating his reluctance to see foreign troops on Kuwaiti soil.<sup>25</sup>

From these developments it was clear that the external threat environment for the state of Kuwait had rapidly deteriorated. The patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait was subsequently oscillating during this period between the goals of **Accommodation** and **Reinforcement**.<sup>26</sup> The asymmetry in power between the two states was still a crucial factor in their relationship. The security problems for the client

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 141830: Planning for the Persian Gulf.

<sup>25</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 30, 1958.

<sup>26</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.



characterised the behaviour as indicated in Table 1.3. Any increases in the threat environment for the client led to a reduction in the clients control over the relationship with the patron.

At the end of September 1958 Sheikh Abdullah brought up the border issue with Iraq in the hope that this area of insecurity for Kuwait could be resolved.<sup>27</sup> The Political Agent, Halford, was quick to point out that the British government had pressured Iraq on this issue for the previous thirty years with no success, and that without British "protection Iraq would have annexed Kuwait long ago."<sup>28</sup> To this Sheikh Abdullah hinted that if British interests in Iraq conflicted with those of Kuwait that Kuwait might be let down as a matter of expediency. Halford vigorously attempted to remove any suspicions that Britain had plotted with Nuri to allow Iraq to annexe Kuwait. After repeated assurances that Britain would stand by Kuwait in all circumstances Sheikh Abdullah dropped the issue.

Legal aspects of intervention in Kuwait were set out in a memorandum sent to Macmillan the day after the revolution in Iraq. It was argued that military intervention could be legally justified under the 'Exclusive Agreement' (the 'Bond') of 1899. Even if Sheikh Abdullah was unwilling to request such assistance the Foreign Office believed that the legal responsibility of Britain to defend Kuwait from external attack or imminent threat of attack justified such action.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation of the agreements between Kuwait and Britain seemed somewhat exaggerated. The need for legal justification in any action undertaken by the British in this area was uppermost in the mind of Macmillan and his advisors because of the lessons of Suez.

Plans were brought to operational readiness for military intervention in Kuwait. The CoS in a meeting on July 18, 1958, reserved their decision on the operations in the Gulf and the movement of forces.<sup>30</sup> The CoS received orders from the Minister of

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<sup>27</sup> See p. 55 of this thesis.

<sup>28</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Kuwait to Foreign Office, September 29, 1958.

<sup>29</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention in Kuwait: Eastern Department to Prime Minister, July 15, 1958.

<sup>30</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention in Kuwait: Eastern Department Minutes: Walmsley, July 22, 1958.

Defence on July 22 to be ready for three contingencies: "A. Immediate entry by invitation, unopposed. B. Entry as soon as possible (minimum is 5 days from now) against Kuwaiti opposition. C. Operation to secure Kuwait after the Kuwait government had joined the UAR."<sup>31</sup>The Macmillan government were following a clear cut policy in military operations in the Middle East. Not only was any intervention to be based upon clear legal grounds, but also, full support from the United States government was to be a prerequisite of action.<sup>32</sup>The Foreign Secretary had departed for urgent talks with the Eisenhower administration shortly after the Iraqi revolution. During the Middle East crisis of July 1958 the issue of supporting the British in the Gulf was put to the Eisenhower administration in the forum of the National Security Council (NSC). The question was: "Should the United States be prepared to support, or if necessary assist, the British in using force to retain control of Kuwait and the Persian Gulf?"<sup>33</sup>Although such action, it was recognised, would damage United States credibility with the non-aligned bloc and went against United States policy towards Arab nations, it was conceded that loss of access to Gulf oil would cause economic dislocation in Western Europe while in addition the loss of Kuwaiti sterling investments would upset the financial stability of Britain. Discussion in the NSC covered the subject:

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<sup>31</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention in Kuwait: Eastern Department Minutes: Note for Department: Walmsley, July 22, 1958.

<sup>32</sup> Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 547, notes 'the blunt fact that [after Suez] Britain could not operate militarily in the Third World in the face of American disapproval.

<sup>33</sup> SDA: NSC: Memorandum for NSC, July 29, 1958.

**Secretary Dulles, commented that 'he thought it agreed that force would be used to preserve access to Middle East oil;... Mr. Allen said that he thought our oil concessions should be adjusted to Arab nationalism, and that perhaps we should make an adjustment in Kuwait... The President said the question is whether we wish to assist the British to hold their oil position by force... Secretary Dulles reiterated that we have agreed to take a strong line on holding the Persian Gulf.<sup>34</sup>**

It was agreed that in the last resort that the United States government would be prepared to use force and would consider supporting the British "with force, whether in Kuwait or some other Near East area to meet Western Europe's requirements."<sup>35</sup>Reporting to Macmillan on his talks in Washington Lloyd wrote:

**I am sure that you are considering anxiously the problem of Kuwait. One of the most reassuring features of my talks here has been the complete United States solidarity with us over the Gulf. They are assuming that we will take firm action to maintain our position in Kuwait. They themselves are disposed to act with similar resolution to the ARAMCO oil fields in the area of Dhahran, although the logistics are not worked out. They assume that we will also hold Bahrain and Qatar, come what may. They agree that at all costs these oil fields must be kept in Western hands.<sup>36</sup>**

The two military operations planned for Kuwait at this time were code named 'Operation Turtle' and 'Operation Valiant.' Operation Turtle consisted of one company landing by air in Kuwait within six hours of mobilisation, followed within twenty-four hours by the leading battalion coming from Aden by air. Deployment of a second battalion would then be completed in approximately ninety-six hours and the third battalion would arrive within four to five days by sea. Operation Valiant presupposed opposition within Kuwait and was therefore based on an even quicker response with two battalions being airlifted into Kuwait within two hours of the first parachute drop. The third battalion would be in place within fifty-six hours having moved by air transport from Aden. The CoS remained concerned about the slow build-up, as speed was rightly thought crucial. By stationing two more companies of infantry

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<sup>34</sup> SDA: NSC: Memorandum of conference with the President, July 20, 1958.

<sup>35</sup> SDA: NSC: Memorandum for NSC, August 19, 1958.

<sup>36</sup> PRO: FO 371/132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention: Kuwait: Lloyd to Macmillan, July 20, 1958.

at Bahrain the timings for the two operations would be improved.<sup>37</sup>The improved timings for Turtle consisted of the second battalion being complete in Kuwait in thirty-four hours and for Operation Valiant the third battalion would reach Kuwait within twenty-four hours.

Once it had arrived the aim of any intervention force would be to gain control of the oil fields around Ahmedi, the refinery and port facilities at Minat el-Ahmadei along with the Political Agency in Kuwait town and the water supply at Abdulliyah.<sup>38</sup>The military requirements that were under constant review would continue to be refined over the next ten years even after they had been put into use following the request for military assistance in 1961 by Sheikh Abdullah.

Military occupation of areas in the Middle East to prevent the spread of either Arab nationalism or Communism was felt to be only a short-term political option by the British government. It might allow an opportunity for the creation of a more favourable political situation, but in the long term accommodation with Arab nationalism was felt to be essential. This was summarised in a Cabinet paper: "In considering future policy, it was difficult to contemplate any other course than either coming to terms with the growth of Arab nationalism or turning the Persian Gulf States, for example, into territories dominated by ourselves through armed compulsion."<sup>39</sup>

Support from the ruler was helpful if not essential from the point of view of international law and world opinion, but the hold on legality that the British gained in this way was dependent on the survival in part of the ruling family in the face of rising Nasserite sentiment in the armed forces and among the people of Kuwait City. The pivotal question was whether "Abdullah Mubarak's confidence in the loyalty of his

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<sup>37</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Note on Middle East policy for Prime Minister, July 30, 1958.

<sup>38</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention: Kuwaiti report: Riches, July 24, 1958.

<sup>39</sup> PRO: CAB 130/ 153: Policy in the Middle East, July 22, 1958.

forces is not as misplaced as was that of the Iraqi Ruling family and leaders."<sup>40</sup> A telegram was sent to the Embassy in Kuwait informing the Political Agent that in the event of a coup the highest priority would be the survival of one member of the al-Sabah family who could then ask for immediate British military assistance.<sup>41</sup>

A personal message was sent to Sheikh Abdullah on July 23, 1958, from the British government reassuring the returning ruler that Britain would fulfil all its obligations with the utmost resolution. The Political Agent was also given leave to inform Sheikh Abdullah of the military preparations that had been taken and the extent to which Britain and the United States were acting together over this Middle East crisis.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, the British government was keen to try and dispel some of the insecurities that Sheikh Abdullah may have felt about the unfolding events. The reaffirmation of support for Kuwait from Britain was also to be expected considering the importance of the client relationship to Britain. Part of the reciprocal trade off between Britain and Kuwait was the guarantee of the security of Kuwait by Britain. While welcoming the British reassurance Sheikh Abdullah pressed his belief that a solution would only come through Britain reaching an accommodation with Nasser.

Oil was clearly the overriding concern of Britain in the Gulf. What the documents clearly show is the extent to which the British government were prepared to go to secure their vital interests at a point when the United States government still regarded the Gulf as a British sphere of influence. Less than two years since the turmoil of the Suez disaster the Macmillan government was prepared to intervene in Kuwait if it fell under the control of the UAR or Iraq either willingly or unwillingly. Even though intervention against the wishes of the al-Sabah family would antagonise the rest of the Arab world and international opinion Lloyd was clear that Britain "must also accept the need, if things go wrong, ruthlessly to intervene, whoever it is has caused the trouble."

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<sup>40</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention: Kuwaiti report: Riches, July 24, 1958.

<sup>41</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Foreign Office to Kuwait, July 26, 1958.

<sup>42</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Foreign Office to Kuwait, Lloyd, July 23, 1958.

It was rightly argued that a limited operation to secure the oil fields could only be tenable for a short period because of popular reaction in Kuwait City. Lloyd accepted the implication that, if reasonable conditions for the production and exportation of Kuwait oil was to be guaranteed, intervention would have to be on an extended basis with the object of controlling the whole of Kuwait and ruling it as a Crown Colony.<sup>43</sup> He went on to say in a note to the Prime Minister that intervention could have great benefits for Britain. It is ironic considering the events of August 1990 that the British Foreign Secretary should write about hypothetical British intervention in Kuwait in 1958 commenting that "the advantage of this action would be that we would get our hands firmly on the Kuwait oil."<sup>44</sup> British vital interests (the free supply of oil) came above any other consideration in the region. Kuwait would not be allowed to join the UAR and if necessary the British government was prepared to send in troops to stop them. Assuming that there could be no overflying of Israel, the UAR, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, forces would initially have to be parachuted from Bahrain.

Political tensions in the Gulf region were reduced by mid-August, partly because of the recognition of the new Iraqi regime by Britain and also by the decision of Sheikh Abdullah to resist the stationing of British troops in Kuwait.<sup>45</sup> By September it was agreed by the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary that the period of notice required to implement Operation Valiant be extended to twelve days. Also twelve days notice would be given for Operation Turtle (on the understanding that if action was required more urgently consideration would be given to using the parachute battalion from Cyprus and overflying Israel). Troops could therefore be moved to other areas with two battalions returning to Kenya.<sup>46</sup> These troops could not be moved north of the air barrier that had developed because of the loss of the

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<sup>43</sup> PRO: FO 371/132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention: Kuwait: Lloyd to Macmillan, July 20, 1958.

<sup>44</sup> PRO: FO 371/132779: Kuwait: Legal Aspects of Intervention: Kuwait: Lloyd to Macmillan, July 20, 1958.

<sup>45</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 18, 1958.

<sup>46</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1959-1959: Extract from record of meeting between the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Defence.

Suez base. Throughout the planning process it was clear that the British military position in the Gulf, post-Suez, was dependent upon the bases at Bahrain and Sharjah supported by the large base at Aden.<sup>47</sup>

Another constraint on British military planning was sheer numbers. British military strength in the Gulf was easily exaggerated by the inclusion of forces stationed at Aden. It was misleading to count these troops because Aden had much broader military responsibilities than the Gulf. If these were excluded there were only around one thousand British troops in the Gulf area, predominantly in Oman, with twenty-six aircraft (twelve of which were combat aircraft).<sup>48</sup> Although British Forces Aden Protectorate (BFAP) was responsible for operational commitments in the Arabian Peninsula and British Somaliland it also had responsibilities for naval operations in the Gulf (and the Arabian Seas when the East Indies Station was closed), but not Gulf territories. In an emergency this situation was likely to change.

**Since the time of the Suez operation, Aden Colony has become a key point for the protection of British interests in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere south of the 'air barrier'. Whereas it was previously possible to reinforce Aden rapidly from the Mediterranean, it is now necessary to station large numbers of RAF and Army personnel in Aden.**<sup>49</sup>

British forces had been placed at a lower level of operational readiness towards the end of 1958 because of the reduction in tensions in the area, but concern about Iraqi intentions arose again in Kuwait a few months into 1959. The fear was over the threat of possible Communist subversive forces sponsored by Iraq, or overt military threats from Iraqi armour. Sheikh Abdullah now hinted that he was willing to countenance more military planning co-operation between Kuwait and Britain. Several authors report Sheikh Abdullah's proud claim that 'no Kuwaiti leader since 1899 had permitted a single British soldier to land on Kuwaiti soil for the purpose of defending

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<sup>47</sup> Gallagher, *The Decline*, p. 151

<sup>48</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 140056: British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain to Foreign Office, January 21, 1959.

<sup>49</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 140056: British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain to Foreign Office, January 21, 1959.

the shaikhdom."<sup>50</sup> However, British forces had been stationed in Kuwait during a short period in the inter-war years when units had supported Kuwaiti forces against Saudi tribal incursions.<sup>51</sup> Apart from this military co-operation had consisted in only the supply of arms and one or two technical officers, advisors and instructors. In April 1959 there were two technical non-commissioned officers and one officer from Britain attached to the Kuwaiti army. The suggestion of moves towards joint military planning is therefore strong evidence of the concern that the Kuwaitis, who were deeply jealous of their internal independence, felt about the Iraqi threat. Yet again the al-Sabah family faced the age-old trade-off of internal autonomy against external security.<sup>52</sup> At this stage the military plans for intervention in Kuwait by British forces were operating on the assumption of four days' warning of any attack by Iraq on Kuwait. Apart from those outlined in Operation Turtle and Operation Valiant, the initial moves included the despatch of a Royal Navy frigate to Kuwait.<sup>53</sup> With the threat of an Iraqi armour the CoS considered the long term move of an armoured squadron from Cyprus or possibly Libya to the Gulf. A new plan was put into place on May 1, 1959, to supersede the contingency plans Valiant and Turtle.

This plan, known as Triplex, was an intervention in Kuwait by four companies of infantry within forty eight hours of the request for help from Sheikh Abdullah. Two of the companies would come from Aden, one from Bahrain by Frigate and one from Sharjah by air. Concern was expressed by the CoS over this plan because it would mean that Aden and Bahrain would be weakened militarily at a crucial political moment. Also the company from Sharjah was soon to be removed, reducing the initial intervention to three companies. The plans for intervention were therefore put in a constant state of review.

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<sup>50</sup> Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq, p. 100; Alani, Operation Vantage, pp. 197-200; Finnie, Shifting Lines, p. 129.

<sup>51</sup> Glubb, War, p.198; See p. 55 of this thesis.

<sup>52</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", p. 566.

<sup>53</sup> PRO: DEFE 6/ 60: JP (59) Note 14, COS and JPS: Military Assistance to Support the Ruler of Kuwait, April 10, 1959.



The discussions of Sheikh Abdullah with the new Political Resident, Sir George Humphrey Middleton, were felt to signify a commitment to talks on military measures. This was a marked advance from the previous year when Sheikh Abdullah had refused to countenance any suggestions of this nature. Due to the increase in the threat environment Sheikh Abdullah was pursuing a **Reinforcement** objective in the client-patron relationship with Britain. The security of the al-Sabah regime and maximum domestic autonomy within Kuwait were his two primary objectives. The problems facing the al-Sabah regime and the British with Iraq were similar in that they both desired friendlier relations with Iraq, but met with problems from the internal developments and external foreign policy of Iraq. Reassurance of British support was again sought by the Kuwaiti leader from the Political Resident, which was readily given, reinforcing the patron-client relationship and building on the bonds of **Affectivity**.<sup>54</sup>

The revolution in Iraq should have simplified the policy position for the British government, by allowing Britain to concentrate on what had anyway become its strongest concern in the Middle East without having to mollify a strategic ally in Baghdad. This opportunity was not really grasped, partly because of a lingering commitment to Iraq, motivated by fear of the spread of Communist influence and expounded through weapons sales.

There was concern expressed by diplomats in the Gulf, and at all levels of the British policy process, that the proposed arms sale to Iraq would damage the progress that had been made with Sheikh Abdullah on security issues.<sup>55</sup> A request had been made by the Qassim regime for arms. The view of Sheikh Abdullah was that the new Iraqi regime was Communist and the argument that the arms sale would help try to curb Communist influence was void. Middleton rightly argued that it was difficult to justify British sales of military goods to a regime that was threatening a state under

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<sup>54</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Bahrain to Foreign Office, Sir George Middleton, May 3, 1959; For an explanation of Reinforcement and Affectivity see p. 22 of this thesis.

<sup>55</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Bahrain to Foreign Office, Sir George Middleton, May 3, 1959.

British protection. He did not accept that Canberras could be regarded as a defensive weapon and believed that if the British government went through with the deal Sheikh Abdullah could possibly turn to Nasser to guarantee the security of Kuwait. His fear was that the deal would be seen as an example of British duplicity and would only reinforce the suspicions of Sheikh Abdullah that Britain was no longer a trustworthy ally. This could have damaged two of the core characteristics of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship: first, its mutually beneficial aspects and second the affinity and loyalty characterised by **Affectivity** inherent in the relationship. The effect could have been to move Sheikh Abdullah from either a **Maintenance** or a **Reinforcement** objective to a **Regulation** or **Accommodation** objective. Middleton wrote:

**It has long been his suspicion [Sheikh Abdullah's] that we were ready to sacrifice the interests of Kuwait for the preservation of our investments in Iraq and the arms deal will reinforce him in this opinion...I am also concerned about the effect on our military plans. The various exercises with which the MCC (Persian Gulf) have been concerned have all been based on the possibility of aggression by Iraq against our vital oil interests in Kuwait. We are now apparently engaged in building up the military potential of our most likely enemy. This will, in any case, call for a reassessment of military plans after 1960.<sup>56</sup>**

The subject came up for discussion in Cabinet. Iraq had made requests for the supply of Centurion tanks and Canberra aircraft. The general feeling in the Cabinet was that if the arms were supplied this would strengthen the hand of Qassim and reduce the spread of Communism in Iraq. Moreover, if they refused to supply weapons the Iraqi government could easily obtain them from the Soviet block and this would thus strengthen the hands of the Communists in Iraq. Consultations had been made with the governments of the United States, Canada, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, all of whom agreed that the arms should be supplied.<sup>57</sup>

The danger of Soviet penetration of Iraq mounted following a revolt in Mosul in which Nasser was clearly implicated.<sup>58</sup> This damaged the position of the pro-

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<sup>56</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Middle East 1958-1959: Bahrain to Foreign Office, Sir George Middleton, May 3, 1959.

<sup>57</sup> PRO: CAB C.C (59) 22: Middle East: Iraq, April 9, 1959.

<sup>58</sup> Marr, The Modern History, pp. 162-163.

Nasserites and strengthened the Communists in Iraq. For a while the Communists were able to terrorise the country with government authority breaking down.<sup>59</sup> The decision of the British government to supply arms was postponed for a few weeks until the picture in Iraq was clearer.

The Cabinet decided that the Iraq arms deal should go ahead. Problems were anticipated from Nasser over such a move. He was likely to increase his anti-British propaganda and this would reduce the chance of a rapprochement, however unlikely, between Egypt and Britain. But it was felt that whether the deal upset the Egyptians or not there was little realistic chance of friendly relations being established with Egypt and the only benefit could come to the British from feeding the traditional Cairo-Baghdad antagonism. Perhaps more important to the Macmillan government were the domestic political benefits. The deal would allow the continued production of Canberras in Britain and would also help deter the Iraqis from withdrawing their sterling balances. If this was the decisive factor, Macmillan was to be disappointed. Iraq withdrew from the sterling area on June 22 -23, 1959, despite the arms sale.

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<sup>59</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 149839: Annual Report for Iraq: Baghdad to Foreign Office, January 1, 1960: Trevelyan.

#### **4.3.2 The changing status of Kuwait: diplomatic representation**

A meeting was arranged between Sheikh Abdullah and the Political Agent, Aubery Halford, upon the return of the Sheikh to Kuwait in late July 1958. Sheikh Abdullah put forward the notion of Kuwaiti adherence to the Arab League. His argument was that just as the British government had assented to the notion of Kuwait joining the Arab Union they could now agree with them joining the Arab League. He believed that this would afford Kuwait greater security by keeping it more in touch with the Arab world. Britain could no longer be expected to intervene in the problems of Kuwait and the other Arab states although he still wished for the agreements between Kuwait and Britain to remain unchanged. Sheikh Abdullah had made it clear that he did not approve of foreign consulates in Kuwait even though he was coming under pressure from the governments of Iraq and Lebanon to accept them. The problem was that allowing one or two might result in a flood of applicants. Membership of the Arab League was a possible solution to this problem. The move would also gain the regime credit from public opinion at home and hostile Arab opinion abroad.<sup>60</sup> This suggestion represented an important change in the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship and was therefore referred to the highest level of the British policy process, discussion between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Concern was expressed by Halford that the adherence of Kuwait to the Arab League would be seen by many people in the Middle East as Kuwait joining the UAR, and that this move would be claimed as another victory for Nasser on Cairo Radio. He believed that the proposal was to be expected and that the move was linked to a heightened awareness of the vulnerability of Kuwait. Halford wrote:

**I can only guess that after his talk with the Political Resident when, in effect, he was forced to acknowledge his ultimate reliance in Her Majesty's Government he felt he must find some expedient whereby he could in public**

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<sup>60</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 31, 1958, 3.30p.m.

**reconcile this relationship with the new forces of Arab nationalism at work around him.**<sup>61</sup>

The proposal came from the need of Sheikh Abdullah to bolster the security of Kuwait. The idea of joining the League came from a desire to be able to defend Kuwait from external forces, especially Iraqi aggression, by some means other than calling on the British to send in troops to Kuwait. The League would deter Iraqi aggression by political rather than military means. The move would also reiterate the commitment of Sheikh Abdullah to Arab unity. Kuwaiti membership of the league would weaken the power that Britain had in the patron-client relationship with Kuwait. It was recognised in Whitehall that this influence might be reduced to the level where the only role that Britain would have in the patron-client relationship would be through its military guarantee of the independence of Kuwait. It was also believed that Nasser would seek to acquire a large share of the petrol dollars of Kuwait if it joined the League. He would then be expected to undermine and destroy the Gulf regimes, such as Kuwait, that had joined the League. It was therefore deemed essential by the Foreign Office that in the event of Kuwait allowing diplomatic representation, Britain should urge the Kuwaiti government to accept as many Western and non-aligned diplomatic missions as possible to counter any dangerous influences from Egypt or Iraq.<sup>62</sup> Britain's perspective on the issue turned on the repercussions that it would have on oil and sterling deposits, and the expectation that rather than adding to the security of Kuwait the League could undermine it. That the League had offered no protection to Iraq, Jordan or the Lebanon, during the Middle East crisis of 1958 was testament to this view.

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<sup>61</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 31, 1958, 5.41 p.m.

<sup>62</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Secret Memorandum on Kuwait, August, 1958.

The Foreign Office began to consider various other proposals that could be developed with Sheikh Abdullah. These included the establishment of Kuwaiti missions to both Arab and non-Arab countries, membership of the United Nations with a re-negotiation of the Exclusive Agreement of 1899, a treaty of alliance between Britain and Kuwait on equal terms, or the incorporation of a third party in the guaranteeing of the integrity of Kuwait. The option of Britain negotiating for Kuwait a treaty with Iraq covering the frontier and trade was put forward. These proposals were put to Sheikh Abdullah but on the understanding that the British government felt that the present relationship with Kuwait did not need changing and that they would stick by their obligations to Kuwait come what may.<sup>63</sup> Reiteration was made of the British view that the safety and security of Kuwait ultimately still depended on their ability to deploy armed forces quickly to defend Kuwait.

In August 1958 the State Department of the United States informed the Foreign Office that they had heard of the proposal of Sheikh Abdullah to join the League and believed he wanted to make some move to show that he supported closer inter-Arab ties. The American position was that a closer tie with Iraq through demarcation of the frontier might occupy his mind and distract him from joining up with Nasser. They also held the mistaken view that a reconciliation could still be reached between Kuwait and Iraq.<sup>64</sup> The British scepticism over the League centred on the influence of Egypt and Nasser within it. They were concerned that if the Kuwaiti government was seeking diplomatic ties to increase its security then these links should

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<sup>63</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Report on Kuwait, August 1958.

<sup>64</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Notes of conversation between Mr. Burdett of the American embassy and Riches of the Foreign Office, August 5, 1958.

be as wide as possible and most importantly to include as many Western or pro-Western missions as possible.

The al-Sabah family actually had no intention of joining up with Nasser and giving up any of their autonomy. Yet the British and American government documents show that both Washington and London believed that joining the Arab League was simply union with Nasser and the UAR. According to the legal counsel of the Foreign Office there was nothing to stop Kuwait joining the League. The agreements between Britain and Kuwait (unlike those with Bahrain) did not forbid the Kuwaitis from entering into a treaty obligation with another State. The problem came in the 'conduct' of relations, currently vested in Britain, and over the question of whether Kuwait could remain under the protection of Britain if it joined the League. Protection in the military sense presented problems. Membership of the League would allow Kuwait to appeal to the Council under Article six of the Covenant for protection against other states.<sup>65</sup> Adherence to the Arab League did not automatically mean the participation of a member in the Treaty of Joint Defence and Economic Co-operation that came under the Arab League Council. In theory Kuwait could still remain under British protection.

The line adopted by the British government was to pitch for a postponement of any quick decision and to try to appeal to the cautious tendencies of Sheikh Abdullah.<sup>66</sup> Surprisingly, when the subject was next broached with Sheikh Abdullah, by Halford, he backtracked, indicating that it was neither a formal proposal nor an opinion but rather a thought for discussion. Halford did not therefore discuss with him the alternatives to the League proposed by the Foreign Office. Sheikh Abdullah indicated

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<sup>65</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: legal points by J.L. Simpson, August 6, 1958.

<sup>66</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Burrows to Lloyd, August 2, 1958.

that his reason for mentioning the Arab League had been the attitude of the British government over the Iraqi negotiations on the Arab Union, and his proposal was as much a test of the response of the British government as an indication of his feelings over that issue.<sup>67</sup> One important side effect of this request or “thought” had been to prompt the British government to consider the likely developments of the international position of Kuwait in the future. Burrows accepted that British jurisdiction in Kuwait was bound to end at some time. He also made mention of the view widely held in the region that future oil supplies would be safer if Anglo-Kuwaiti relations were placed on a less peculiar footing.<sup>68</sup> Sheikh Abdullah requested more confidence in his abilities and less jittery concern in London.

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<sup>67</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Burrows to Lloyd, August 18, 1958.

<sup>68</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132786: Kuwait and the Arab League, Burrows to Lloyd, August 2, 1958.



Burrows in a report to the Foreign Office wrote:

**I know that Kuwait is vitally important to us, but it would be much better if we did not say so quite so often. It would also be better if we did not so often suggest that something terrible was just going to happen with regard to it. With the example of Iraq before us it is always possible that something terrible will happen, but neither we nor the Ruler can at present detect an imminent danger and public alarmism on our part is only likely to bring on the thing we fear by exciting political activity in Kuwait to greater heights than at present.**<sup>69</sup>

The question became one for the back burner as Sheikh Abdullah left Kuwait for another holiday towards the end of August and was not reconsidered until late September, with a clarification of the relationship between Kuwait and Britain.<sup>70</sup> Over certain issues it was accepted in Whitehall that the active participation of Sheikh Abdullah in the conduct of the foreign relations of Kuwait would be of mutual benefit to both Britain and Kuwait. Essentially the relationship remained fundamentally the same with the al-Sabah regime shouldering some of the responsibilities of Kuwait in the Arab world. The British policy of supporting and encouraging the desire of Sheikh Abdullah for friendlier relations with neighbouring Arab states was continued. This comprised supporting Kuwait in joining and taking a full part in various international bodies including those associated with: marine, postal services, telephones, telecommunications and quarantine. The first steps in this process would come with the full adherence of Kuwait to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).<sup>71</sup> Although the decision had been taken to allow Kuwait to join the ITU, at this stage, the Foreign Office had not decided whether Kuwait should join these international organisations as a "Protected State of the UK, or independently."<sup>72</sup>

Remarks made by Sheikh Mubarak about the League on his visit to Cairo at the end of September upset the British government. Sheikh Abdullah denied any knowledge of what Sheikh Mubarak had said and also denied having sent a letter to the Secretary General of the Arab League. He reiterated his decision not to join the

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<sup>69</sup> PRO: FO 371/132786: Kuwait and the Arab League: Burrows to Hayter, August 18, 1958.

<sup>70</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132779: Kuwait: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 24, 1958.

<sup>71</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132547: Memorandum for the Secretariat: Government of Kuwait, September 30, 1958; For details on the ITU see p. 108 of this thesis.

<sup>72</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 132547: Kuwait Letter of Assurance, October 21, 1958.

League. The Arab Press made much of this incident suggesting that Kuwait was on the verge of joining the League and renouncing her special relationship with Britain. Any British move therefore to support Kuwaiti application for full membership of the ITU and other international bodies would now be seen as a capitulation to pressures from the UAR. Macmillan was concerned over these developments. Commenting on the membership of Kuwait to the ITU he wrote:

**It involves our admitting implicitly and, if necessary, explicitly that Kuwait is fully responsible for the conduct of its international relations; and although such a statement merely confirms what is already the case, it will undoubtedly be seized upon by popular opinion throughout the Arab World as an indication that we are gradually yielding to the pressure of the UAR.<sup>73</sup>**

The general conservatism of the Gulf Sheikhs enabled the British to act slowly or not at all on many issues. The international position of Kuwait was one such issue and could be tackled over time. It was not until January 1959 that the subject once more came up between Kuwait and Britain. Discussion now centred upon the question of consulates in Kuwait. The Exclusive Agreement of 1899 specifically forbade the admission of foreign consuls without the permission of the British government.<sup>74</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah was now of the opinion that Arab consuls in Kuwait would be inescapable in the long run and that the independent status of Kuwait, reiterated in the letter of assurance from Britain, allowed him to make his own decision on this issue.<sup>75</sup> Halford, who recognised the need to rebuild the confidence of the al-Sabah regime in the British, pressed for a clear and quick response from Whitehall. Sheikh Abdullah seemed determined to make some sort of gesture to Arab nationalism, but the problem for the Foreign Office was to find an outlet for this that did not damage the patron-client relationship and the security of Kuwait. The danger with consulates was that they could be used by foreign powers as bases for subversion, propaganda and dissent. The desire for an Arab gesture had to be tempered with the need for

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<sup>73</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Kuwait's International Relations: Macmillan, October 4, 1958.

<sup>74</sup> See p. 48 of this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Kuwait's International Relations: Halford to Foreign Office, January 5, 1959.

internal security. Sheikh Abdullah again tentatively suggested the adherence of Kuwait to the Arab League as perhaps the solution. The Foreign Office was sympathetic to this suggestion as it was clear that Sheikh Abdullah would eventually decide to accept Arab consuls and would sooner or later decide to join the Arab League. Such developments, it was also acknowledged by the Foreign Office, could not be stopped without an unacceptable amount of damage to the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship.<sup>76</sup>

Macmillan sent a personal message to Sheikh Abdullah thanking him for his frank views and asking for some time to consult with Lloyd who was at this time in hospital. He wrote:

**Meanwhile I should like you to know that I entirely understand your views about the logic of events and the requirements of Kuwait's interests. I have no doubt that the time has come to show flexibility in adapting the long-standing relationship between our two states to changed circumstances, but I am confident that whatever changes may occur it will be possible to preserve the fundamental features of that relationship.**<sup>77</sup>

Macmillan clearly understood that more emphasis was being placed by Kuwait on the goal of greater autonomy yet his government desired that the fundamental features of the patron-client relationship should remain in place. The policy of Sheikh Abdullah was quite subtle. He was facing the traditional problem for the al-Sabah family of reconciling internal autonomy and external security. The Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship certainly needed to evolve, but in a way that kept these two vital objectives balanced. Some of the suggestions put forward by Sheikh Abdullah were as much ploys to test the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship and the British position as serious policy moves.

Interestingly, Middleton was convinced that Sheikh Abdullah was still against the idea of foreign consuls as the British. He believed that Arab consuls once in Kuwait would place tremendous pressure on Kuwait to join the Arab League. Alternatively if Kuwait were to join the League, either as an associate member or a full member, the

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<sup>76</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Kuwait's International Relations: Macmillan to Halford, January 6, 1959.

<sup>77</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Kuwait's International Relations: Macmillan to Ruler, January 6, 1959.

pressure might well be removed for it to take consuls.<sup>78</sup>In Kuwait at this point, apart from the Political Agent, there was only an American Consul. His exequatur was issued by the Queen and his dealings with the government of Kuwait, apart from on routine matters, were communicated through the Political Agent. There were also Saudi and Pakistani trade agents operating in Kuwait.

Characteristically, Sheikh Abdullah decided to wait and see the outcome of developments in the region before choosing either consulates or the Arab League. The issue came before the British Cabinet in late January 1959. It was decided that the Foreign Secretary should be invited to instruct the Political Resident, Middleton, to tell Sheikh Abdullah that the British government, while preferring no change to the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship, acknowledged his need to make a gesture to the domestic and regional populace. The Cabinet decided that this should take the form of the accession of Kuwait to the League, not the establishment of consulates in Kuwait.<sup>79</sup>

The international status of Kuwait in line with the traditions of the patron-client relationship and Kuwaiti history was changing gradually. The major change was in Kuwait's move from a protected to an independent state. Although no formal revision of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship had been made at this time, Kuwaiti membership of international organisations was having a fundamental if gradual effect on the international position of Kuwait. These included institutions dealing with shipping, telecommunications, postal services and civil aviation. Together, they brought the Kuwaiti government into the international system. Part of the reason for Kuwait joining these international organisations had indeed been to give meaning and function to Kuwaiti independence. Keohane persuasively argues that: "A major function of international organizations - perceived by small and middle powers - is to allow these

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<sup>78</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Kuwait's International Relations: Middleton to Foreign Office, January 11, 1959.

<sup>79</sup> PRO: CAB 129/ 96 3(7): Middle East: Kuwait, January 29, 1959.

states acting collectively to help shape developing international attitudes, dogmas, and codes of proper behavior."<sup>80</sup>

In April 1959 a tanker was due to be delivered from Japan. This was the first large ocean going vessel purchased by the newly formed Kuwait Tanker Company. The ship would be registered in Kuwait and fly a Kuwaiti flag. The Kuwaiti government with the assistance of the British was acceding to the various maritime organisations and conventions. This included membership of the International Safety of Life at Sea and Load Line Conventions. Kuwait with the full co-operation of Britain joined this convention as an independent state. Membership was not extended to Kuwait as a territory for whose international relations Britain was responsible. The British government also agreed to support the full application of Kuwait to the ITU. Full membership of the ITU was only appropriate if the state applying was fully independent.<sup>81</sup> The local subsidiary of Cable and Wireless had been taken over by the Kuwaiti government on January 31, 1956. The application for membership of the ITU formed part of the desire of the Kuwaiti government to express its independence. Britain had fallen back on the role of agent rather than controller of the foreign relations of Kuwait and even this position was under pressure.

The British Postal Agency in Kuwait was taken over by the Kuwaiti government on February 1, 1959. Kuwait issued its own stamps to mark the occasion and put in an application for membership of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). Admission for new members had historically been restricted to 'sovereign countries'. Kuwait was following the same route as it had done for the ITU.

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<sup>80</sup> Robert O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics", International Organisation 23 (1969), 297.

<sup>81</sup> See p. 108 of this thesis.

For International Civil Aviation purposes Kuwait, like the other Gulf Sheikdoms, was considered a British territory and formed part of a British system which was organised for the purpose of international bargaining over air traffic rights. A confidential agreement had been signed in 1956 in which Sheikh Abdullah had agreed to Britain being responsible for negotiation of traffic rights after consultation with him. Kuwaiti Airways was at this time associated with BOAC and as long as this association proved convenient and Kuwaiti interests were safeguarded by Britain the agreement seemed set to continue. Under the Chicago Convention of 1944 Kuwait was regarded as a 'protected state'.

Kuwait was therefore regarded as an independent state in some international bodies while for others it was still a protected state. Kuwait had associate status in UNESCO, because this arrangement was made before the British decision on the membership of Kuwait to the ITU. However special arrangements were made for Kuwait to conduct its own aid program directly with UNESCO.<sup>82</sup>

The dominating theme for Kuwait and the al-Sabah family, from the Iraqi revolution through to the intervention of British troops in 1961, was the transformation of the internal structures of Kuwait to meet the developments that had resulted from the changes in its external environment. Internal autonomy and external security still remained the dominating concerns in the policy of Sheikh Abdullah. The Political Agent, Richmond, put this another way in his annual report on Kuwait. He eloquently wrote:

**The problem facing Kuwait's Rulers has always been how to preserve an independent existence among more powerful neighbours...and the rulers of Kuwait have been faced in recent years with their old problem in a more complex form: how to reconcile Kuwait's independence with the new and**

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<sup>82</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 2752: Kuwait's International Relations: Report on Kuwait, March 23, 1959.

**powerful emotion of Arab Unity and how to adapt their absolute rule to the new conditions and a more sophisticated population.<sup>83</sup>**

The al-Sabah family for all this internal pressure for change never faced an effective internal challenge to their power in this period. The wealth derived from oil made Kuwaitis poor revolutionaries. The only exception to this was in February 1959 when the Kuwaiti Social Clubs, the Social Affairs and the Educational Departments got together and organised a celebration of the anniversary of the UAR formed on February 1, 1958. Twenty thousand people attended the nationalist celebrations in which the speaker Jassim Qatami called for "the Sabah to yield power or have it taken from them."<sup>84</sup>The al-Sabah family reacted with traditional repression and Clubs of a pan-Arabist persuasion were dissolved while some of the press were suppressed.

Kuwait continued on its path towards becoming a modern state throughout 1959 and 1960. An important element in this development was the reforming of the judiciary and the law. Judge Sanhoury from Britain arrived in Kuwait in October 1959 and quickly set about revising the law and the judiciary. His expertise ensured that achievements were made quickly in this area. By the end of 1960 a substantial amount of law had been enacted into Kuwait. This included criminal legislation, commercial law, civil and commercial procedure rules, health legislation, budget law, laws setting up currency board, a reformed public works department and a municipal council. The budget law and the new civil service establishment were produced by Sheikh Jabir al Ahmad. His reforming drive had set up the structure of a modern governmental machine.

Change in the areas of new international commitments, domestic legislation and reform continued at a rapid pace. The British government continued to assist Kuwait in the development of what Richmond termed "her international personality."<sup>85</sup>In March 1960 a spokesman on behalf of the British government testified, at a preparatory

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<sup>83</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 148896: Kuwait: Annual Report for 1959, January 4, 1960: Richmond to Middleton.

<sup>84</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 148896: Kuwait: Annual Report for 1959, January 4, 1960: Richmond to Middleton

<sup>85</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156823: Kuwait: Annual Report for Kuwait 1960, January 5, 1961: Richmond to Middleton.

meeting of the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation Conference, that "Kuwait was fully responsible for the conduct of her international relations."<sup>86</sup> By the end of 1960 Kuwait had gained full membership of the ITU, the Universal Postal Union, the World Health Organisation, the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the Special Fund of the United Nations, and the United National Educational and Cultural Organisation.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship blossomed from late 1958 onwards. The lack of any serious disagreements between the two states and the close co-operation in international affairs benefited from and added to the dyadic bond. The growing strength of this relationship and the return of confidence of the al-Sabah in the British was evident to Richmond. He wrote in his report for 1960 that the "reward [for the British government] has been a year free from any serious disagreement with Kuwait, a close co-operation in international affairs and even more tendency to consult us in internal matters from which in the past the Kuwaitis have tended to exclude this Agency as far as possible."<sup>87</sup> The relationship was once more on a setting characterised by affinity and **Affectivity**. The events of 1961 would see a further reinforcement of these two characteristics.

#### 4.3.3 Oil and OPEC

In the short term the basic structure of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship was not changed by oil, but as Jill Crystal writes "it raised the stakes by creating both greater constraints and greater opportunities."<sup>88</sup> Oil had reinforced the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship throughout this period. The free flow of Kuwaiti oil at reasonable prices had been part of the reciprocal exchange of resources in the patron-client relationship. The money generated from this oil for Britain and

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<sup>86</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156823: Kuwait: Annual Report for Kuwait 1960, January 5, 1961: Richmond to Middleton.

<sup>87</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156823: Kuwait: Annual Report for Kuwait 1960, January 5, 1961: Richmond to Middleton.

<sup>88</sup> Jill Crystal, Kuwait and the Transformation of an Oil State (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992) p.5.



Kuwait along with the strategic importance of the oil itself had become the *raison d'être* for Britain being in the region. British interest in Kuwait had risen rapidly in line with the increase in its oil production. Clear instructions on Kuwait had been sent out in 1953 to the Political Resident, Burrows. The direction of British policy towards Kuwait was shaped over the next few years by the underlying facts noted in these instructions.

**During the last three years Kuwait has become of prime importance to the United Kingdom and the sterling area as a whole. It is now a major source of oil supplies and an important element in our balance of payments...HMG can no longer afford to confine themselves to the role authorised by the treaties in all matters which affect the political and economic stability of Kuwait or which may affect the interests of the United Kingdom in the widest sense. The new conception of the role of HMG in regard to Kuwait entails a change in the nature of the advice to be tendered to the Ruler and in the channels through which that advice is communicated.<sup>89</sup>**

The nationalisation crisis of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) of 1951-1953 had forced British oil companies to expand their operations in other areas. Kuwait had become the main source of oil for Britain and by the time of the Suez crisis in 1956 fifty percent of British petroleum crude supplies came from Kuwait and over eighty percent from the Gulf area.<sup>90</sup>

British petroleum imports from Iran up to the crisis in Iran of 1951-53 had consisted of refined petroleum products developed at the Abadan refinery. These imports were replaced by non-refined crude oil. This gave the opportunity to the oil companies to change their refinery policy. Frank Brenchley writes that "Western governments, for balance of payments and employment reasons, were pressing for refineries to be built in their [own] countries. The companies, and especially AIOC, were the more inclined to yield to this pressure when they had seen the difficulties caused, not by the loss of Iranian oil but by the loss of the Abadan Refinery."<sup>91</sup> The balance of power between the producers and the buying states continued to change

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<sup>89</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 104270: Kuwait: Foreign Office Minutes, July 17, 1953: Ross to Burrows.

<sup>90</sup> Kelly, *Shifting Lines*, p. 128.

<sup>91</sup> Frank Brenchley, *Britain and the Middle East: An Economic History 1945-87* (London: Lester Crook Academic Press, 1989), p. 112.

with refineries being built outside the region, because crude oil was less marketable than petroleum products and so reduced the bargaining strength of the producers.

During this period discovery of oil in marketable quantities was made in Nigeria, Algeria and Libya. These discoveries had three affects on the politics of oil. First, these oil finds along with the development of other known supplies in the Soviet Union and Canada increased the supply of oil. Second, the new finds, especially in North Africa, gave the oil companies another option to Gulf oil and reduced some of the Western reliance on this area. Third, supplies from the new producer states were less dependent upon transit facilities across politically volatile areas, such as the Suez Canal, to get to the markets of Europe. Libya was to become an important supplier of crude oil to Britain in the later 1960s and early 1970s.

For all the changes in refinery policy and the increase in production outside the Middle East, Europe was still dependent upon oil from the Gulf. A United States government report, on the dependence of Europe on Middle East petroleum, estimated that by 1960 over seventy percent of the oil needs of Europe would be met by this area.

Table 4.1 shows the primary sources of the oil supplies of Europe under normal conditions and points to the significance of the Middle East as a source of supply. Figures for 1955 are used because those for 1956 and 1957 were distorted by the Suez Crisis.

TABLE 4.1  
THE SUPPLY OF OIL TO EUROPE

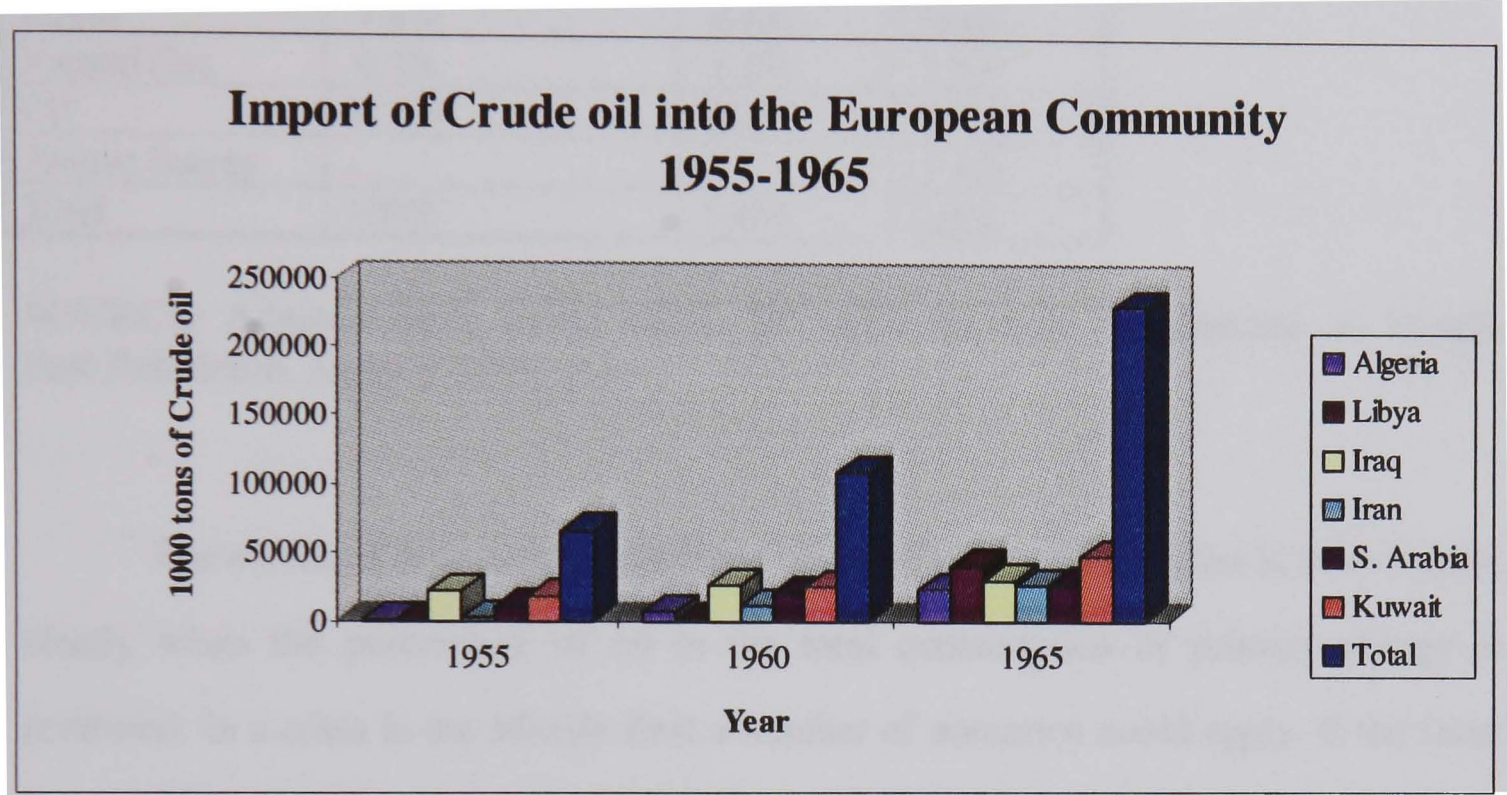
Year Thousand barrels per day	1955 Actual	1960 Estimated	1965 Estimated
Total Normal Demand	2368	3750	4800
Indigenous	178	300	350
Imports- Middle East	1730	2675	3150
North Africa (principally Algeria)	-	100	400
West Africa	-	50	100
United States	350	450	450
Other Western Hemisphere	350	450	450
Communist Block	60	200	300

SOURCE: Adapted from: SDA: MILL 207: Free Europe's Dependence on Middle East Petroleum, January 1959, p. 2.

Comparing oil consumption with consumption of other fuels shows that oil made up less than a third of the total energy sources used. Coal and Lignite still remained the primary energy source for Europe and could be expanded in times of emergency. Table 4.2 presents a breakdown of the relative importance of demand for primary energy of Europe, at this time, also estimated by the United States government.

Figure 4.1 shows the actual figures for Crude oil into the European Community from 1955 to 1965 (West Germany, France, Italy, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg).

Figure 4.1



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: Office Statistique Des Communautés Européennes 1950-1965 Yearbook (Brussels: Statistical Office of the European Community, 1966).

It is clear from Figure 4.1 that Western Europe remained heavily dependent on oil from the Gulf region, although with large increase of imports between 1960 and 1965 there was a relative decline in dependency on this area.

**TABLE 4.2**  
**THE ENERGY SOURCES OF EUROPE: TOTAL CONSUMPTION**  
**OF PRIMARY ENERGY IN EUROPE**

Year Percentage	1955 Actual	1960 Estimated	1965 Estimated
Coal and Lignite	70.5%	62.3%	56.0%
Hydro	7.4%	8.1%	8.6%
Natural Gas	0.7%	1.1%	1.3%
Oil	21.4%	28.5%	32.3%
Atomic Energy	-	-	1.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%

SOURCE: Adapted from: SDA: MILL 207: Free Europe's Dependence on Middle East Petroleum, January 1959, p.1.

The extent of European dependence on oil from the Middle East is shown more clearly when the percentage of oil in the total consumption of primary energy is reviewed. In a crisis in the Middle East a number of scenarios could apply. If the Suez Canal were to be closed and the oil pipelines to the eastern Mediterranean were to be shut down, Europe could still operate. This could be achieved by re-routing the oil in tankers around the Cape of Good Hope. This had been done during the Suez crisis of 1956 and would be again during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. With strict rationing of petrol in Britain and the export of emergency supplies from the Americas (America, Canada, the Caribbean and Venezuela), Europe dealt with these crises, admittedly at high financial cost. This scenario assumed that North African and Communist block supplies would still remain available. The second scenario would entail a curtailment of all Middle East oil and Communist block supplies. In this case with all the emergency measures in place 'Free Europe' would be operating in 1960 with sixty-nine percent and in 1965 with fifty-nine percent of its oil requirements.<sup>92</sup>

The United States and Britain were following a third possible scenario in the formulation of their respective Gulf policies. This entailed the continued access of at

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<sup>92</sup> SDA: Mill 207: Free Europe's Dependence on Middle East Petroleum, January 1959, p. 4.

least one main supplier of oil with all other oil cut off: from North Africa, the Communist block and the Middle East. In the case of the United States this would be either Iran or Saudi Arabia and for Britain it would be Kuwait. This third scenario would only bring a ten percent reduction in oil supplies for 'Free Europe'.

The cost of any of these scenarios would have been felt most by Britain and then by France. Any oil crisis involving Middle East oil would entail large dollar expenditures and would therefore be very damaging to the British economy. This would be because of the switch from cheaper Middle East oil that could be paid for partly in sterling to North American oil paid for wholly in dollars.

The British therefore had most to fear from any disruption of Middle East oil supplies. An energy crisis would also involve the loss of petro-sterling, and an outflow of dollars and gold leading to a resultant currency crisis. This took place during the Suez crisis, when it had been the currency problems that had fatally wounded the Eden government.<sup>93</sup>

Table 4.3 shows the emergency export capabilities, estimated by the United States government, of the various Middle East countries through the Gulf.

TABLE 4.3  
ESTIMATED EMERGENCY EXPORT CAPABILITIES OF OIL  
EXPORTING STATES IN THE GULF REGION

Year	1960	1960	1965	1965
	Thousand barrels per day	Percentage of the estimated whole	Thousand barrels per day	Percentage of the estimated whole
Iran	1000	21.3%	1700	25.8%
Iraq	300	6.4%	500	7.6%
Kuwait	1800	28.3%	2300	34.8%
Saudi Arabia	1300	27.6%	1500	22.7%
Other	300	6.4%	600	9.1%
Total	4700	100%	6600	100%

SOURCE: Adapted from: SDA: Mill 207: Free Europe's Dependence on Middle East Petroleum, January 1959, pp. 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> Kyle, *Suez*, p. 500.

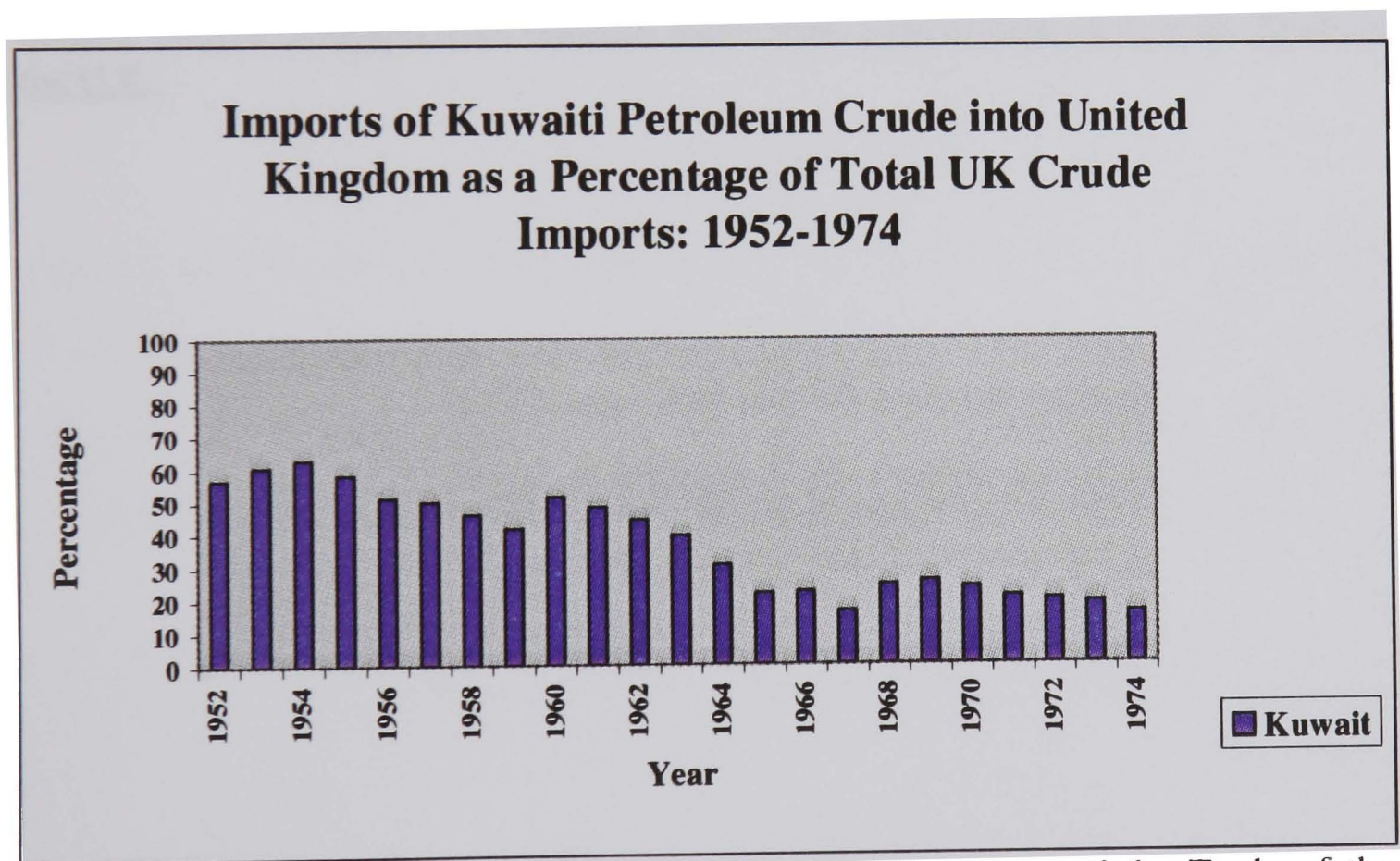
It was estimated at the time that the level of normal exports through the Gulf would reach 2,855,000 barrels per day in 1960 and 3,310,000 barrels per day in 1965. From Table 4.3 clearly in a time of emergency as long as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia continued production and increased it to the maximum level the normal exports from the Gulf could be maintained. For instance in 1960 the combined projected emergency export capabilities of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait was put at 3,100,000 barrels per day, while the estimated level of exports through the Gulf was 2,855,000 barrels per day. Similarly in 1965 the combined projected emergency export level of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was expected to be 3,800,000 per day while the estimated normal level of exports through the Gulf was 3,310,000 barrels per day. Due to the scale of production that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia could attain in an emergency the strategic security of oil production could be maintained by the West by protecting just Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The added advantage to Britain of Kuwait making up any of the shortfalls in an emergency was that the oil would be paid for in sterling.

The importance of Kuwaiti oil to Britain and the importance of oil to the Kuwaiti economy ensured that a strong bond developed between the producer, the host and the consumer of this oil (see Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.7). The lack of skilled technical personnel in Kuwait meant that the Kuwaiti economy and the Kuwaiti government would remain dependent for some time on the Western oil companies operating in Kuwait. This dependence was a vital reinforcing element in the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. Figure 4.7 shows the importance of oil revenue to the total income of the Kuwaiti government between 1956-1963. By 1960 oil accounted for around eighty percent of government revenue. Investment income, the majority of which came from the London money markets and the Kuwaiti investment board, was also an important element in this government income. Although it would not have been difficult to market Kuwaiti oil to other consumers on the international oil market this could only have been achieved with the support of the oil companies in Kuwait.



Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 clearly show the vital importance of Gulf oil in general and Kuwaiti oil in particular to the British economy. Throughout the height of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship in the late 1950s and early 1960s a large percentage of British oil came from Kuwait and the Gulf. The British government and the oil companies from the mid-1950s onwards were attempting to reduce Britain's dependence on Kuwaiti and Gulf oil for other sources of oil as can be seen from Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3. The increase in British dependence on Kuwait oil in 1960 after five years of decline was as a result of the Iraqi revolution and the resulting problems between the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Petroleum Company.

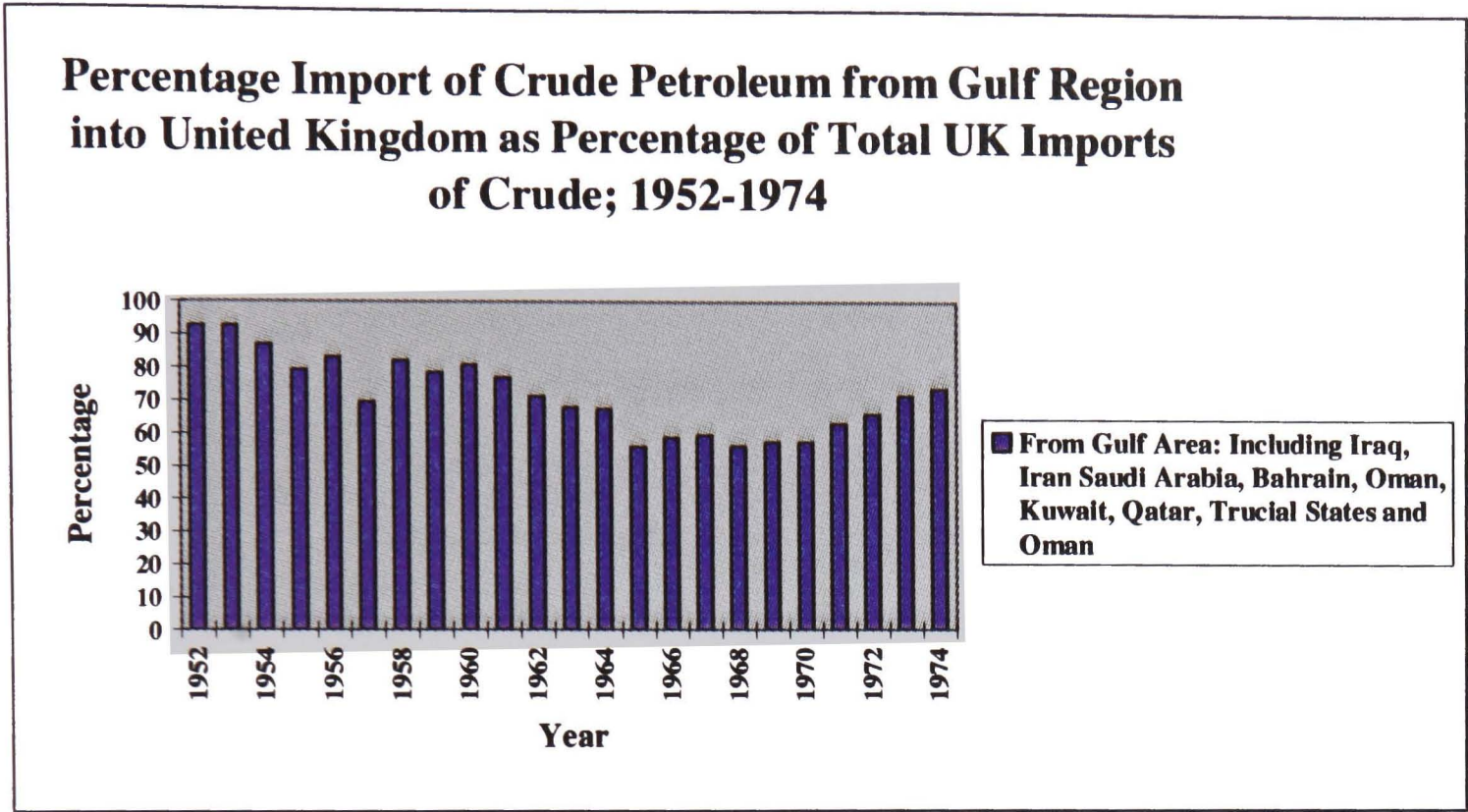
Figure 4.2



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: Annual Statement of the Trade of the U.K. (London: HMSO, 1952-1975).

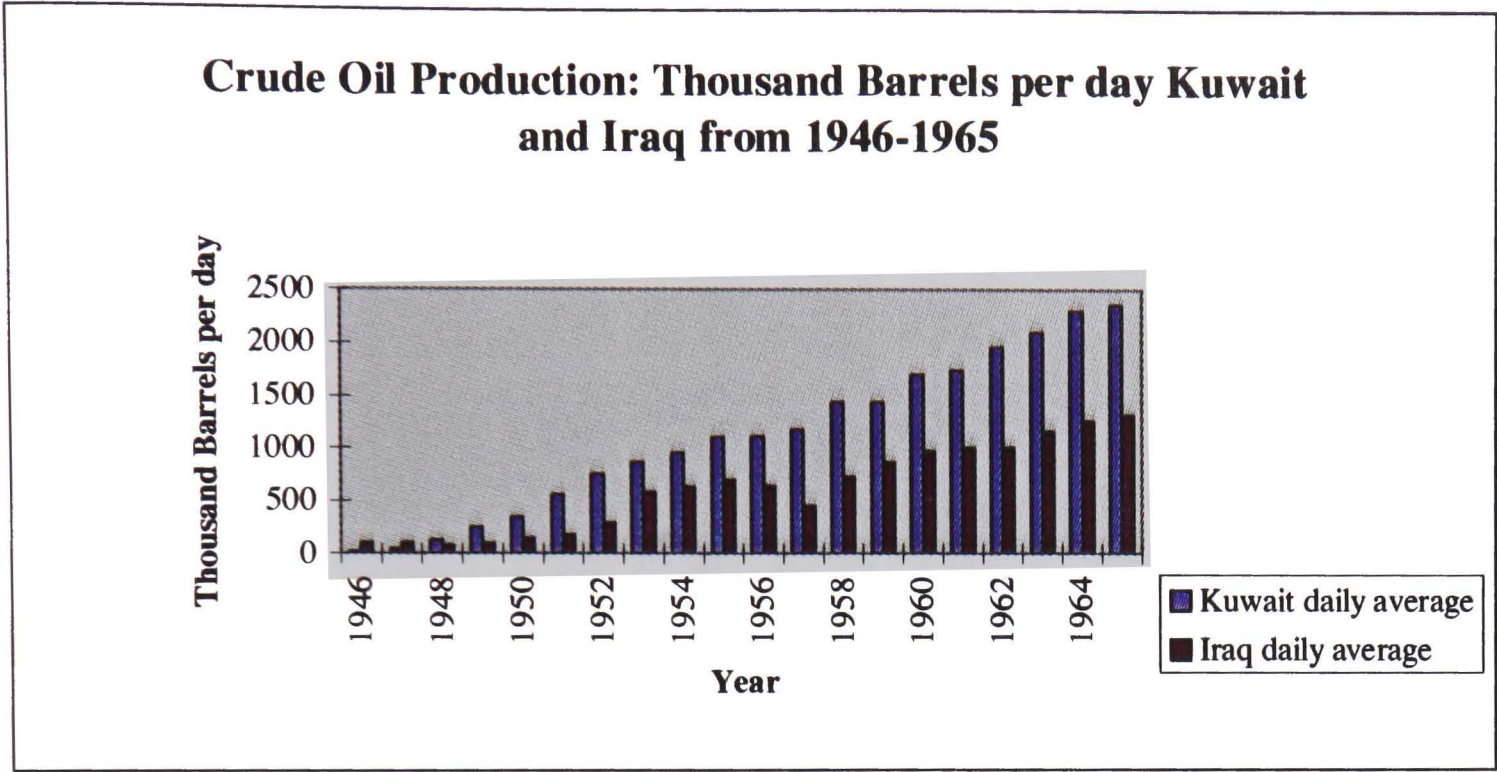


Figure 4.3



Source: Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: Annual Statement of the Trade of the U.K..

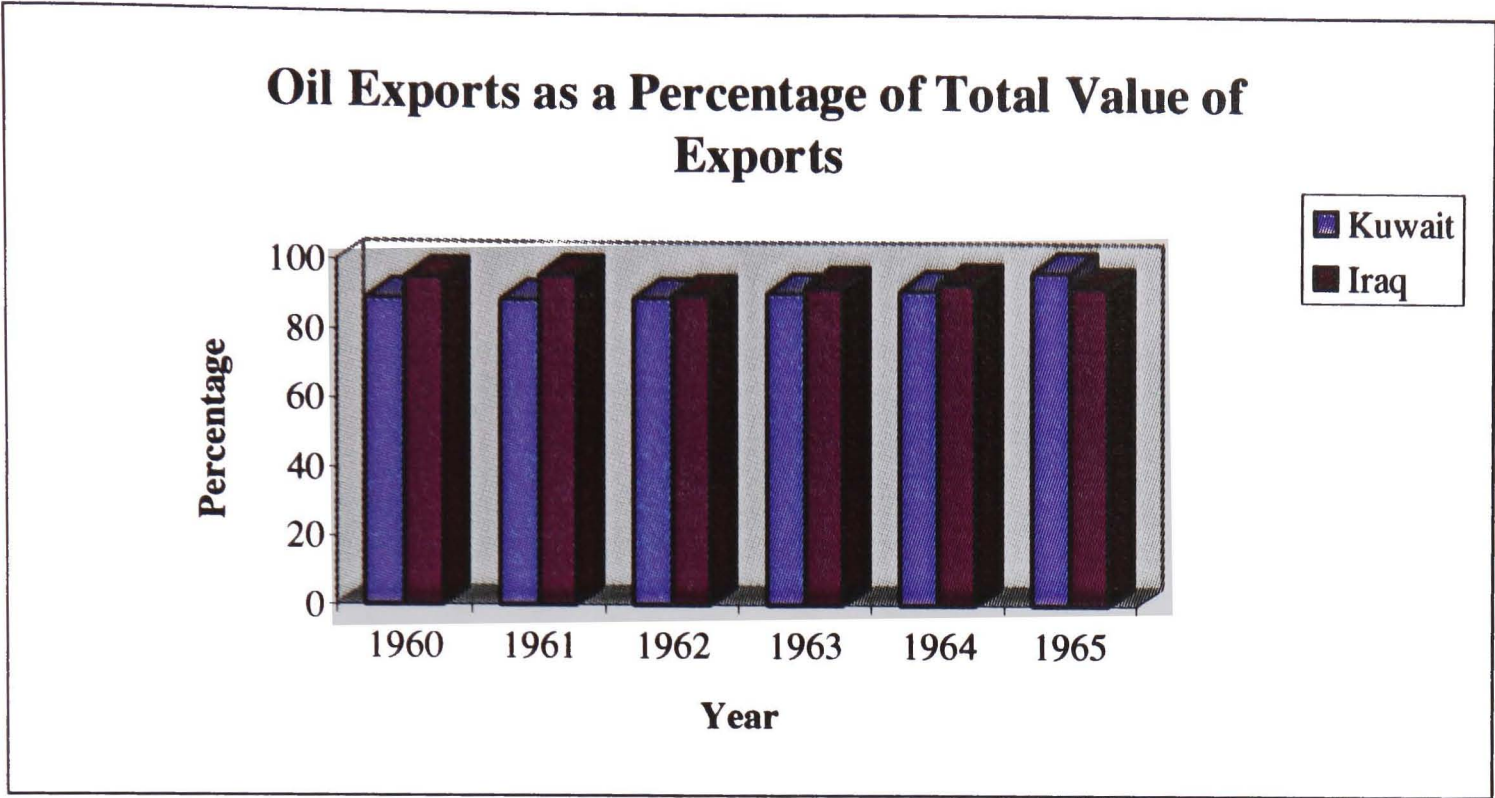
Figure 4.4



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: OPEC 1989 Annual Statistical Bulletin (Vienna: The Secretariat of OPEC, 1990).

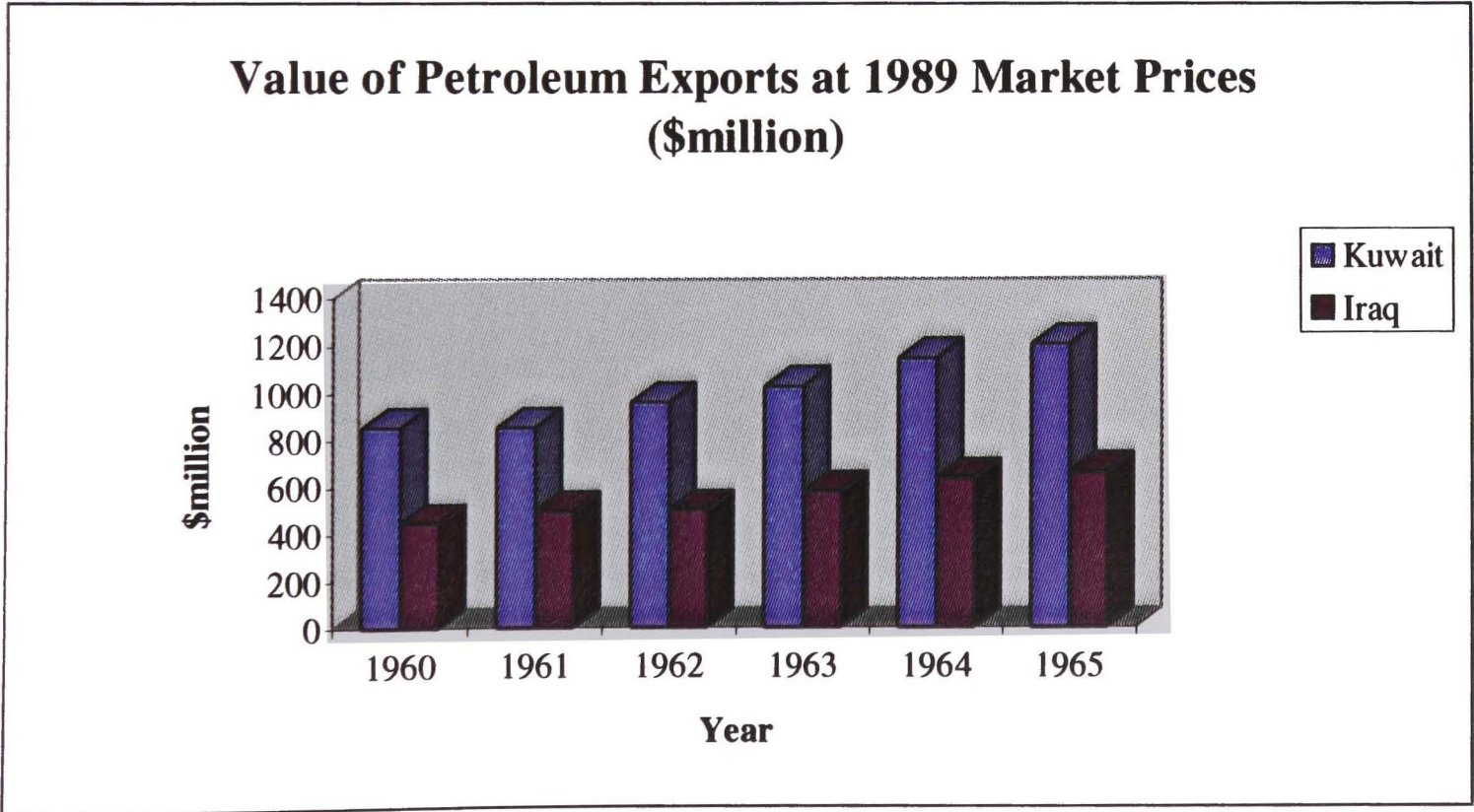
Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5 show that Kuwait clearly outstripped Iraq in the production of oil. The graphs also show that economically Kuwait was a very tempting prize to Iraq, both as a source of government income and as an export earner. Figure 4.6 indicates the actual financial prize that Kuwait represented to Iraq at 1989 prices.

Figure 4.5



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: OPEC 1989 Annual Statistical Bulletin, p. 7.

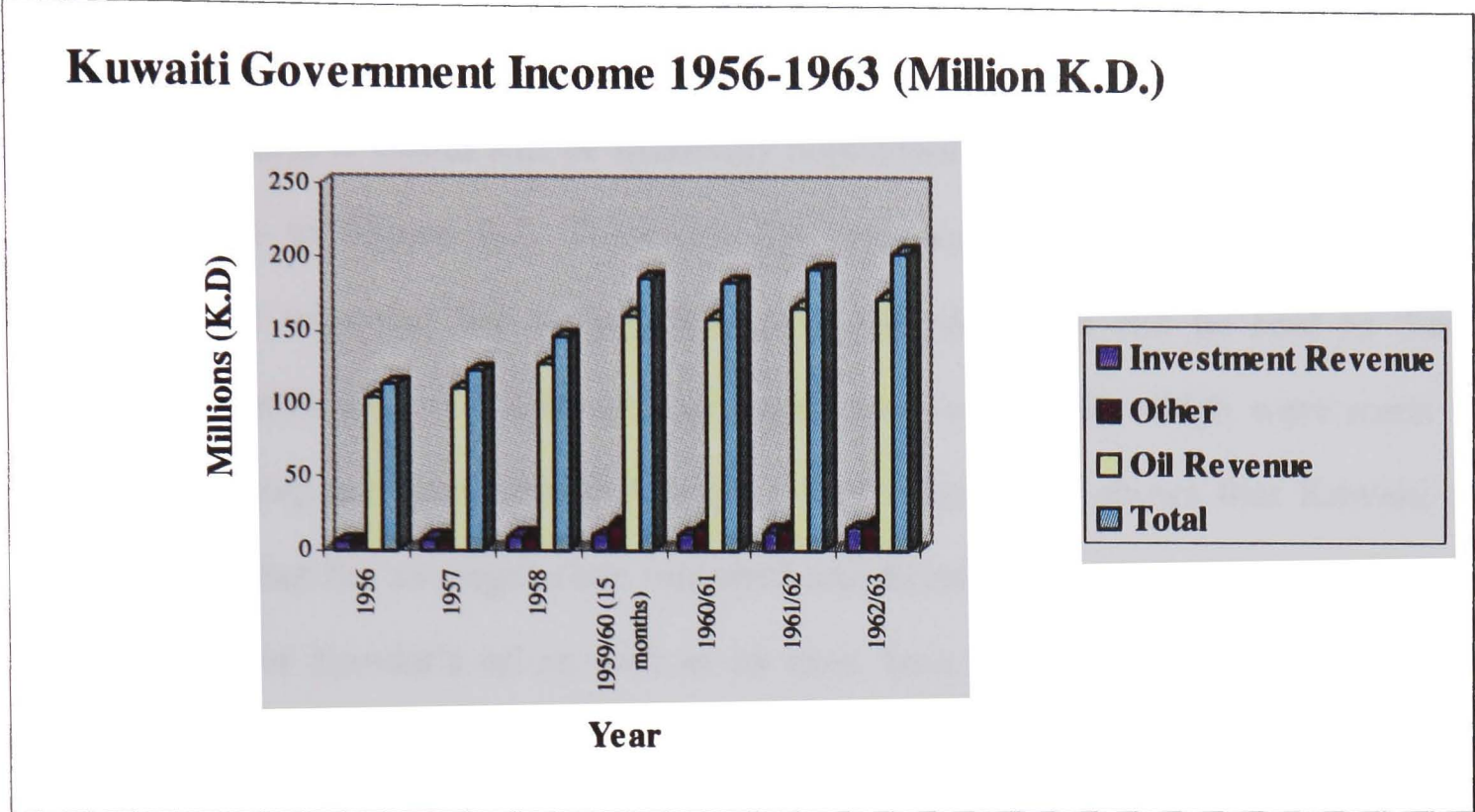
Figure 4. 6



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: OPEC 1989 Annual Statistical Bulletin, p. 6.

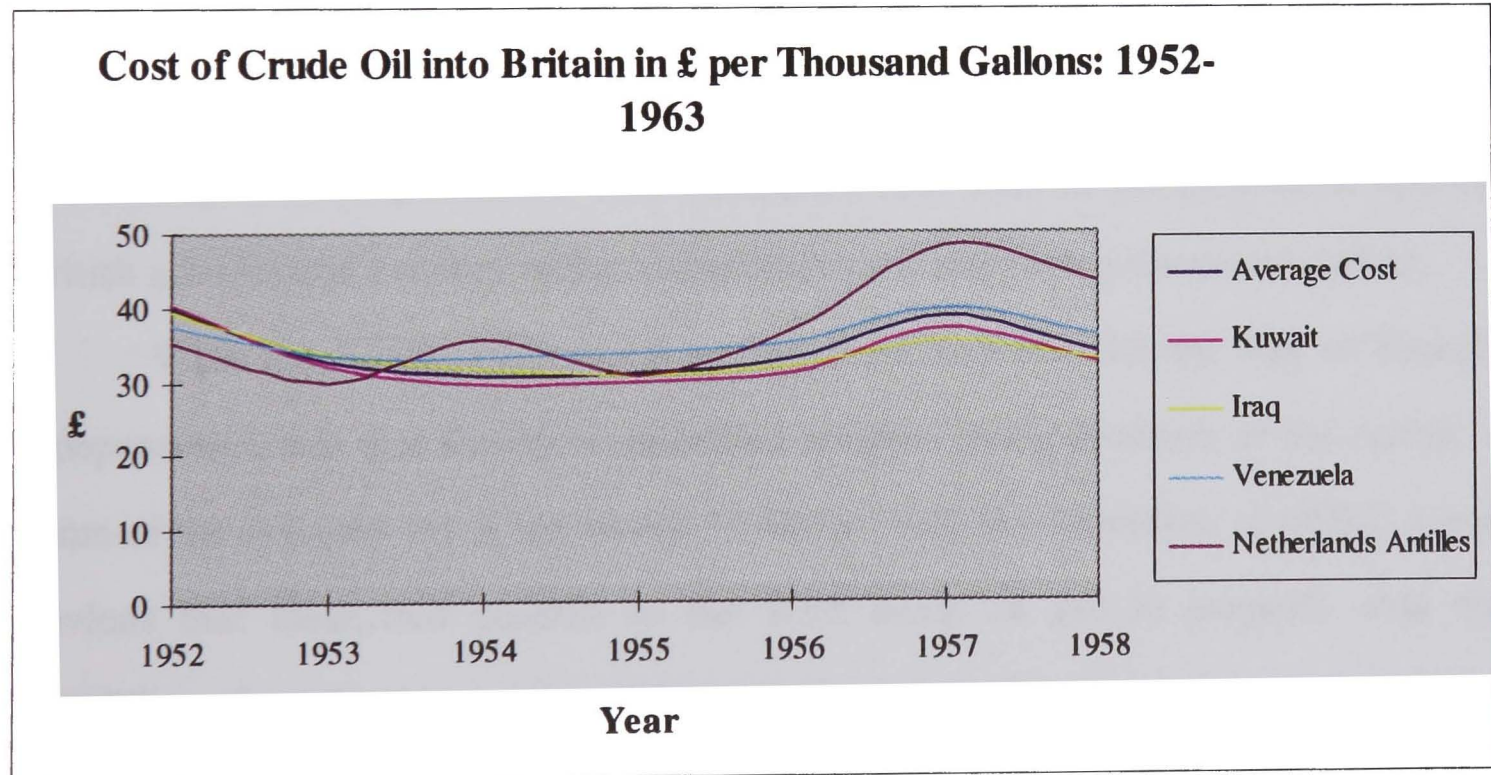


Figure 4.7



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: OECD Financial Statistics (Paris: OECD, 1956-1964).

Figure 4.8



Source: Adapted from statistics taken from: Annual Statement of the Trade of the U.K.

Two observations can be made about the importance of oil to the Kuwaiti economy. First, that whatever the political alignment or relationship Kuwait had with the outside world it would still be massively dependent upon the sale of its oil. This is clearly shown in Figure 4.7. Therefore the consumers of the oil could be quite confident that whatever the regime in Kuwait the oil would still be sold to them. Second, the rationale of British security guarantees to Kuwait, which were made to ensure the cheap and uninterrupted supply of oil (Figure 4.8 shows that Kuwaiti oil was cheaper than the average crude imported into Britain), were based on sound logic. With control of Kuwait's oil as well as its own, Iraq would have had a big enough market share to cause short-term disruption of a very destabilising kind either through price manipulation, or by withholding supplies, or by diverting supplies. Also its position with the oil companies would have been much stronger.

Unfortunately, some of the key files on British oil policy at this time have remained closed from the Public Records Office. However, it would probably be correct to surmise that the British government was deliberately trying to reduce its dependence on Kuwaiti oil in the late 1950s because its control in the patron-client relationship was being reduced. This assumption also leads to the conclusion that the British government's energy policy and military planning were quite closely linked.

What the British government could not be sure of, with the loss of Kuwaiti independence, was that Kuwait would either remain a swing producer or the source of some of the cheapest oil in the world. However, with the formation of OPEC it was obvious that these two benefits to the West could be put in jeopardy with the possibility of production quotas and standard pricing. The advantage of Kuwait, as may be seen from Table 4.3, was that oil production could be rapidly increased and therefore could act to reduce the effects of an oil crisis caused by the sudden shortfall of oil for whatever reason. Low production costs and ease of extraction in Kuwait meant that it was also some of the cheapest crude to produce in the world. This was of importance to a British economy under heavy financial constraints.

Even though the demand for oil was increasing rapidly by the late 1950s, supply was still above demand. Prices of oil fell during this period for a number of reasons. These included the emergence of large reserves and excess production capacity, the entry of new states into the production of crude, the increase in the number of independent refiners with the ability to bargain for lower priced crude, and the decrease of production and supply costs. It was in the oil companies interest to lower the posted crude prices as this was the level at which they paid royalties to the oil states. On August 9, 1960, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey announced a reduction in the posted price of crude oil. This was followed on August 11 by Shell and on August 16 by British Petroleum.<sup>94</sup>The economies of the majority of the oil producing states depended heavily on the sale and profits from oil. Falling oil prices were met with disdain by these producers. The governments of the oil producing states were invited to Baghdad, and out of these meetings that ended on September 14, 1960, emerged the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This organisation was committed to the preservation of the 1960 posted prices. This new organisation was not strong enough in its early years to raise prices but was successful in stopping any further reductions. Kuwait had drawn closer to the other Middle East oil producing states by being one of the founder members of OPEC and by setting up the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). For the British government these two developments signalled both the ending of a fully independent Kuwaiti oil marketing policy and the eventual desire of Kuwait to run its own oil industry.

These two developments were to have a profound affect in the long term on the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. Along with the enormous wealth generated from oil production, that had already transformed Kuwait internally, these developments meant that Kuwait would eventually be in a position to replace the client-patron relationship with rentier security policies.<sup>95</sup>This entailed buying off

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<sup>94</sup> Roger Stevens, Middle East Oil in International Relations (Cambridge: Leeds University Press, 1973), p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> Tétreault, "Autonomy", pp. 577-578.

potential enemies and keeping existing allies sweet with the use of massive dollar diplomacy. British control of the foreign policy of Kuwait had clearly come to an end. Kuwait was now firmly on the route to full independence. British de facto recognition of the independence of Kuwait would be followed in time by de jure recognition. This represented a major change in the patron-client relationship. Yet this major shift did not imply that the client-patron relationship was not still in operation. To the contrary, the insecurity of Kuwait was reinforcing the bond. Ironically, this insecurity was partly caused by the transition period in Kuwait's international position, and as such was leading to an Indian Summer in the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship underwent a steady process of change during this period. The reduction in British power in the Middle East caused by Suez and the Iraqi revolution had ramifications for the dyadic relationship. The vacillations of the British government over the possible adherence of Kuwait to the Arab Union and over arms sales to Iraq also damaged the patron-client relationship. But an increased threat environment for Kuwait caused by the revolution in Iraq tempered the **Regulation** of their relations with Britain that the Kuwaitis might otherwise have been expected to pursue. Instead of assuming any more overt form, **Regulation** was attempted by the development of Kuwait's "international personality" and the level and breadth of its security. Some measure of **Regulation** had to be attempted because it was clear to the ruling family that in certain respects the dyadic relationship with Britain was now actually undermining its internal security. What Kuwait needed, and what was sought during this period, was membership of a myriad of institutional and bilateral groupings and relationships that would collectively increase its security. Kuwait was what Robert Keohane characterises as a "system-

ineffectual" state. Pertinently to Kuwait, Keohane writes: "Some states that cannot hope to affect the system acting alone can nevertheless exert significant impact on the system by working through small groups or alliances or even through universal or regional international organizations: These may be labelled 'system-ineffectual' states."<sup>96</sup> The reality for Kuwait was that its patronal state had become less powerful and more problematic as an ally. The need or adjustment was therefore to develop and foster other relationships in the international environment to deal with this new reality. The major policy questions for Kuwait was whether the transition to a collective or diversified pattern of guarantees could be accomplished without losing British support, and whether the new system would deliver reliable security. Kuwait wanted to avoid falling between stools and to be sure that the new stool had at least three sound legs.

For the British this period was one of profound change brought on by the realities of the developments in Iraq and Egypt. Although British commitment to the Gulf had actually increased through extension of bases in the Gulf, the remit and modes of behaviour of British forces had been tempered and changed. In July 1958 the British Foreign Secretary had advocated the use of force to take over Kuwait if oil was denied to the West, even by the al-Sabah regime. While they might tolerate or even encourage the al-Sabah strategy of diversified security, the British were so dependent on Kuwaiti oil that they could not afford for Kuwait to make a move in its foreign policy that jeopardised the security of its oil.

What is clear is that there was a great deal of vacillation and dither on both sides. Both states wanted to maintain the patron-client relationship, but without paying the cost (military, for Britain; political for Kuwait). The new Iraqi regime interpreted

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<sup>96</sup> Keohane, "Lilliputians", p. 295.



this weak policy from London as suggesting potential future acquiescence by Kuwait and Britain to external aggression.

## **Chapter 5: The Crisis; May to December 1961**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter 5 is split into five parts. The first covers the crisis in Kuwait from May to December 1961. The second assesses the policy of Britain in the region, while the third deals with the multilateral diplomacy of the major actors. The fourth looks at the policy review of the patron, and the fifth contends with the military dimensions of the crisis.

### **5.2 The crisis**

Discussions were held in London during 1960 about the status of Kuwait, the further securing of Sheikh Abdullah's position, and the protection of vital British and Western interests in Kuwait. No conclusions were reached on these issues at this time, but consideration was given to admitting an independent Kuwait into the Commonwealth. Nothing came of this proposal, although rumours about it were widespread throughout the region early in 1961. Qassim attacked the idea in a speech on April 30, 1961. He declared that there were "no frontiers between us and the Kuwaiti people."<sup>1</sup>

These comments of Qassim were cause for concern for governments in both Britain and Kuwait, at this time on the verge of formulating new mutual relations. A denial of the Commonwealth rumour was formally issued by the Kuwaiti government.<sup>2</sup> Nerves were settled in the early part of June when the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hashim Jawad, reassured Trevelyan that Qassim's comments were 'purely historical.' A statement issued jointly by Iraq and Kuwait on commercial relations boosted Kuwaiti and British government confidence further.

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<sup>1</sup>Majid Khadduri, Republican Iraq - A Study in Iraqi politics since the revolution of 1958 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Khadduri, Republican Iraq, p. 169.

Planning for a Kuwaiti declaration of independence on June 19, 1961, therefore went ahead. The British government did not anticipate any overtly hostile reactions from Qassim to the announcement of Kuwait's independence, or to any problems within Kuwait itself. This thinking was based on four factors.

The first of these was that Trevelyan in Baghdad was advising that the Iraqi government had recognised the independence of Kuwait de facto, implying statehood in a number of official letters and by its support for Kuwait's application for membership of international organisations open only to independent autonomous states. The second factor was the belief that the internal pressures in Iraq inhibited Qassim from adopting an aggressive foreign policy. These internal concerns included a Kurdish rebellion in the north of Iraq, the increasing strength of the Ba'thist opposition, and the important negotiations with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). The third factor was Qassim's lack of credibility both in Iraq and in the Middle East because of his opposition to pan-Arabism. Trevelyan argued that Qassim was in too weak a position to contemplate action over Kuwait.

**Negotiations with the Iraq Petroleum Company, against which there is widespread emotional prejudice, have been difficult, though this is no new phenomenon. They are made more difficult by the weakness of Qasim's internal position... The development of the internal situation remains unpredictable. Opposition to Government is a natural feature of the Iraqi political scene and, though Qasim may disappear any day, it is not out of the question that he will be able to hold on to power for some time, despite the chorus of his detractors... <sup>3</sup>**

The fourth factor was the absence of nationalist forces within Kuwait following their suppression in February 1959. Internal pressures within Kuwait towards unity with the UAR had therefore been removed.<sup>4</sup>

Although it was not expected that there would be open support for Kuwait's independence it was not believed that Qassim would react in a hostile manner. The agreed policy was to help guide Sheikh Abdullah down the path of acknowledged

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<sup>3</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 15760: Annual Report for Iraq, January 2, 1961: Trevelyan.

<sup>4</sup> S. K. Hashim, "The Influence of Iraq on the Nationalist Movements of Kuwait and Bahrain, 1920-1961" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1984), p. 443.

independence at the pace and extent of his choosing, as long as this did not damage the position of the British government with regard to Kuwait, or the vitally important Kuwait Oil Company. The advice from Luce was that carefully measured moves legalised in the traditions of British governments in the Gulf through exchange of letters would be the appropriate form of dealing with the Kuwaiti statehood issue. An Exchange of Letters was duly made on June 19, 1961 signifying Kuwaiti independence. The text of the agreement consisted of four sections.

**(a) The Agreement of the 23rd of January 1899, shall be terminated as being inconsistent with the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait**

**(b) The relations between the two countries shall continue to be governed by a spirit of close friendship**

**(c) When appropriate the two Governments shall consult together on matters which concern them both**

**(d) Nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter request such assistance.<sup>5</sup>**

The import clause was (d) which signified the continuance of the British security guarantee for Kuwait. The important change being that the Kuwaiti government would determine if and when a request for assistance should be made. Clause (a) publicly recognised the independence of Kuwait. The wording clearly signifying that Britain was not giving Kuwait independence, but rather recognising it formally.

On June 19, 1961, Kuwaiti independence was announced. Six days later, General Qassim, the ruler of Iraq, responded with a declaration that he would issue a Republican Decree the next day appointing Sheikh Abdullah Qaimqam of Kuwait in the Liwa of Basra. Qaimqam was a title from the Ottoman Empire that had been conferred on the Sheikh of Kuwait by the Turks. This protocol was being adopted by Qassim to try and show that Kuwait was part of Iraq through its historical origins in

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<sup>5</sup> Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq, pp. 104-105.

the Ottoman Liwa of Basra.<sup>6</sup> Qassim also made an historical claim to the right of Iraq to Kuwait: that Kuwait was a part of Iraq and that Iraq refused to countenance false agreements.<sup>7</sup> The next day Qassim duly issued the decree.<sup>8</sup> One week later British troops entered into Kuwait at the request of Sheikh Abdullah.

How was it that the gradual development of Kuwaiti autonomy through membership of international organisations had suddenly culminated in a public statement of full independence? How had the British and the Kuwaitis failed to grasp that the unequivocal assertion of Kuwaiti statehood was bound to be taken as unacceptable provocation by Iraq, while the equally unambiguous declaration of Kuwaiti independence from Britain would necessarily be taken as a reduction, if not an abandonment, of Britain's commitment to Kuwaiti security?

Sheikh Abdullah had always chosen the path of measured careful diplomacy throughout his reign. The relationship of Kuwait with Britain and its place in the system of states had evolved by close consultation with the British. Following the Suez war the al-Sabah family had pressed slowly towards taking over the international responsibilities and foreign relations of Kuwait from the British. The first steps had been for Kuwait to join a number of international organisations, followed by agreement that Kuwait should take on more responsibility for foreign affairs with its Arab neighbours. The agreement of June 19 was perceived by both Kuwait and Britain as one more step in a gradual transition, and certainly something far short of an abrupt termination of their long-standing relationship. This may explain why the strong reaction of Qassim over the announcement of the independence of Kuwait was not expected by the British. Relations between Kuwait and Iraq had never been very close or amicable. Yet the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Jawad, had, a few weeks before, characterised Kuwait as a sovereign state. There remained long-standing quarrels between the two countries over water, arms, date farms and the border. But during the

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<sup>6</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, pp. 105-106; Kelly, *Shifting lines*, pp. 130-132.

<sup>7</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 25, 1961: Trevelyan.

<sup>8</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Iraq annexation of Kuwait, June 26, 1961: Trevelyan.

Nuri period, up until July 1958 there had been discussions, through the British, about resolving the many problems between the two states. And although this process had slowed down when Qassim came into power, both Britain and Kuwait remained hopeful that issues could be resolved.

So while some concern had been expressed by the British Ambassador to Iraq over the timing of the announcement of Kuwaiti independence, the stance of Qassim and the subsequent crisis still took the British by surprise. The emergency also shattered the attempt by Sheikh Abdullah to lead Kuwait along a quiet path to full and effective independence. He had tried to reduce the importance of the client-patron relationship between Britain and Kuwait that had so long guaranteed the integrity of the city state. The internal and external security policy that he had pursued had been bound up with the traditional alliance with Britain. The announcement of Kuwait's independence signified the beginning, but not much more, of a move away from the Anglo-Kuwaiti client-patron relationship towards a more oil dollar related diplomacy. This change in policy was strewn with dangers but, at the same time was a necessity for the state in the prevailing anti-imperialist climate. But no one in Kuwait or Britain had anticipated the extent and immediacy of the danger. Now, within a week of being given control for the conduct of its own foreign relations, Kuwait was fully exposed to the dangers and extremes of the international system.

The crisis highlighted all the problems for the British in the maintenance of their position in the Gulf region. Britain was still guaranteeing the security of Kuwait by offering the intervention of British troops. To honour this commitment would be logistically difficult and politically dangerous. The successful response of the British in July 1961 would show the viability of the integrated command at Aden and the flexibility of the new strategic doctrine. The declining position of Britain in the region and the world coupled with the general pattern of withdrawal from colonial engagements had posed the question of whether it would ever unilaterally be able to perform "Operation Vantage" or any similar operation in the future on its own. The British government had to engage in strenuous diplomacy to set out and explain the

British position to Commonwealth and European countries. The difficulty of securing diplomatic support for the Kuwaiti issue, especially from Sterling Area countries, was a measure of the changed power position of Britain. Middle East states that had once been controlled by either Whitehall or the British Imperial Raj were now challenging Britain's weakened position in the region. Iraq was following in the wake of Iran and Egypt.

The Gulf region was becoming bound up in the politics and power plays of the wider Middle East region. Also the Cold War was beginning to be played out in the area. The British were becoming less able to deal with all these problems in the Gulf and were turning increasingly to the United States for more support. The gradual decline in British influence was being hidden by the developing strength of the Anglo-American relationship as they both began to co-ordinate their policies for the Gulf region.

The shape of security in the region had been changed dramatically by Qassim. He had made the vulnerability of Kuwait a real and dangerous reality. His reasons for making such overt claims on Kuwait might not necessarily be evident but the effects were clear enough. The American Ambassador in an interview related a very interesting conversation that he had had with Nasser at the time of the Kuwaiti problem.

When this was at its height, I went out to see Nasser, and after discussing the situation, I asked him how he accounted for Qassim's move toward Kuwait, what he thought Qassim was after. And Nasser said, 'well you tell me what you think they're saying in the diplomatic corps.' And I said, 'I think most of the diplomats here think that it's very closely related to Kuwait's role as a major oil producer. Qassim has been threatening to nationalise the Iraq petroleum company. They noted that when Iran nationalised its oil, the nationalisation did not affect them because Kuwait took up the slack. If he could now control Kuwait, as well as Iraq, he'd have a real corner on the oil market and could get his economic objectives.'

To this Nasser replied, 'well there may be something in this,' But he said, 'The trouble with all you people are you make things too complicated.' He said, 'I think it was very much simpler.' Now this is almost an exact quote. He said, 'I think Qassim and his chief of staff went to the men's room one morning. And one said to the other, 'Why don't we take Kuwait?' And the other one said, 'Well,

**Mufti by God, it's a good idea. Let's do it.' He said, 'this is the way many of our decisions are made.<sup>9</sup>**

The secondary literature suggests that there were three underlying reasons for the revival of Qassim's irredentist claims on Kuwait.<sup>10</sup> First, and most importantly, was Kuwait's oil assets. They represented a substantial prize for the Qassim regime. Second, was the dynamics of the internal state of Iraqi domestic politics. The claims to Kuwait were certainly a useful device of Qassim's to shift the political focus from domestic to foreign affairs and if possible unite the politically fragmented nation behind a popular issue. Third came the strategic priority of gaining a secure major Gulf port besides Basra, which suffered from security threats from Iran because of the dispute over the Shatt al-Arab. Significantly, one of the first acts of the Qassim regime when it took power in 1958 was to take a loan from the Soviet Union of £66m for development of the port at Umm Qasr.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever Qassim's reasons for threatening Kuwait, one of the effects was to internationalise the whole issue. The use of British troops and the subsequent use of the Arab League forces to protect Kuwait heightened tensions throughout the region. It also highlighted the cold war between Cairo and Baghdad and the emptiness of Arab claims to solidarity. The crisis spilled over into the United Nations where the diplomatic manoeuvrings became embroiled with the larger East-West Cold War. The security of Kuwait and Gulf oil had become the major policy objective of Britain for the region. Qassim in one week had undermined and threatened this policy.

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<sup>9</sup> USA: JFKL: Oral history interview with John S. Badeau, February 25, 1969: New York City for the John F Kennedy Library: (Ambassador to UAR 1961-1964), pp. 1-13.

<sup>10</sup> Chubin, Security in the Gulf, pp. 27-28; Richard Gott, "The Kuwaiti Incident", in D. C. Watt, ed. Survey of International Affairs (London: RIIA, 1961), pp. 523-23; Majid Khadduri, Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 168.

<sup>11</sup> James H Noyes, The Clouded Lens: Persian Gulf Security and United States Policy, 2nd. ed. (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), pp. 10-11.



## **5.3 British policy in the region**

### **5.3.1 Political aspects**

The British government and Sheikh Abdullah interpreted the press conference given by Qassim as a direct threat and challenge by Iraq to the integrity of Kuwait. The response of the British to the speech of Qassim was crucial. A quick move to defend Kuwait under clause (d) of the exchange of letters of June 19 could have backfired on them, since this could easily have exposed them to the criticism of old style imperialist gunboat diplomacy in which Kuwait was still a tool of the British. But if the plans of Qassim were to invade Kuwait then a slow British military response could have proved disastrous, and this possibility prompted Richmond, the Political Agent in Kuwait, to send for urgent instructions and advice from London.<sup>12</sup>

The Foreign Office sent words of sympathy to Sheikh Abdullah and presented its initial views on the problem. After consultation with their Ambassador in Iraq, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, the Foreign Office informed Richmond that they believed Qassim had spoken on the spur of the moment and probably against the advice of the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jawad. First indications were that Qassim was unlikely to turn to the military option over the issue. This was based on the unstable internal situation in Iraq and the consequent need to use a large proportion of the Army for internal security. The Foreign Office advised on a calm approach by the Kuwait government, with no statements that could be viewed as provocative by Iraq.<sup>13</sup> The hope was that the attitude of Qassim could be moderated by reason.<sup>14</sup>

Walmsley, who was assistant to the head of the Arabian Department, Beaumont, consulted with Trevelyan on whether the Iraqi 1932 recognition of the Iraq-Kuwait boundary should be made public. It was decided that the publication of Nuri Said's letter of July 21, 1932, might provoke Qassim to further action.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Kuwait to Foreign Office, June 26, 1961: Richmond.

<sup>13</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Kuwait, June 26, 1961.

<sup>14</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Confidential: The Iraqi threat to Kuwait: June 26, 1961: Walmsley.

<sup>15</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Foreign Office to Baghdad, June 26, 1961: No.780.

Trevelyan advised that the letter should not be published, because Qassim would only reciprocate by firstly denouncing this as having been written under pressure from the Imperialist British and secondly, publishing the later claims to Kuwaiti territory made in June 1958 by Nuri Said.<sup>16</sup>

The preliminary assessment of George Hiller, head of the Eastern Department, was also that Qassim was unlikely to resort to military action over Kuwait. Qassim wanted Kuwait to join Iraq, and the new Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement with the future possibility of Kuwait joining the United Nations and the Arab League was a threat to this policy. The suggested British policy to deal with this issue was to show a "firm" but "not provocative" response to Qassim, with the hope that other Arab countries could be encouraged to take up the issue with Iraq. This assessment was similar to the views of Trevelyan and the Arabian Department.<sup>17</sup>

Trevelyan met the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Jawad, on June 26, 1961. Iraqi and British views on Kuwait were exchanged at this meeting. Trevelyan stated that Britain had never recognised the claims of Iraq to Kuwait and that the new agreement between Kuwait and Britain was not a new departure but merely the recognition that Kuwait had been responsible for its own international relations for some time. Trevelyan commented that during their previous discussions on the questions of Consuls and of the emerging independence of Kuwait Jawad had not put forward any objections. The Ambassador went on to point out that Jawad had welcomed the new position for Kuwait. In discussion, Trevelyan had asked Jawad how he had viewed the emergence of Kuwait to independent status to which Jawad responded that he "welcomed the acquisition of independence by an Arab State" although, significantly, he did not refer to the claims of Iraq.<sup>18</sup> Jawad expressed to Trevelyan some of the difficulties that he was in over this question. The British Embassy in Baghdad concluded that Jawad had not been consulted before Qassim made his statement on Kuwait and that the Foreign

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<sup>16</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 27, 1961: No.650: Trevelyan.

<sup>17</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Confidential: Qassim's policy towards Kuwait, June 26, 1961: Hiller.

<sup>18</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 26, 1961, No.633 at 4.14p.m.: Trevelyan.

Ministry opposed the aggressive policy being pursued by Qassim. An official of the Ministry remarked that his Minister [Jawad] was "like a man walking in the desert who was suddenly hit by a large rock from behind."<sup>19</sup>

Trevelyan was one of the key players in the direction and formulation of British policy in the Middle East. His assessments of the Iraqi position on Kuwait would be instrumental in subsequent developments. The Foreign Office requested his opinion on the motives of Qassim and the possibility of military action by Iraq. It was stressed to the Ambassador that the earliest possible warning of any Iraqi military moves be communicated to London.<sup>20</sup>

Trevelyan claimed that the prime motive of Qassim was to manoeuvre Kuwait into a union with Iraq and that this was a foreign policy position held by many in Iraq. Taking Kuwait would also allow Qassim to exert substantial market power following a nationalisation of IPC. Control of oil was a vital issue in the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute. The enormous wealth that Kuwait possessed, its function as a swing producer, as well as the potential market share that could be gained by annexation were tempting prizes for Qassim. In addition to the external reasons for the strategy adopted by Qassim there were also important internal reasons for the move. The Ambassador believed that this declaration was a way for Qassim to improve his weak position within Iraq by adopting a strong nationalist display of aggression.<sup>21</sup> Twelve hours later Trevelyan sent a more detailed prognosis. He wrote:

**Qassim's original plans may have been further developed than guessed and may have included an early internal coup supported by military action, perhaps timed for July 14, under cover of the usual troop movements. They may well have begun to take shape during his visit to Umm Qasr in March after his and Jawad's talks with Abdulla Mubarak, whose part in all this, if any, is obscure, but who, as I have reported, is believed to have special connections with Qassim.**<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156845: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 26, 1961, No.633 at 4.14p.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>20</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Baghdad, June 26, 1961, 2.44p.m.

<sup>21</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 26, 1961, 11.26p.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>22</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 27, 1961, 11.25a.m.: Trevelyan.

Trevelyan, although cautioning at this stage that this was only a hypothesis, indicated that Hussain Jamil had stated that Qassim was considering not only statements but also the use of force. The vulnerability of his internal position was now viewed as the prime spur. The reassessment of Trevelyan of the position in Iraq was that the internal unrest could best be countered by Qassim with a bold foreign policy move. The Anglo-Kuwaiti declaration had foiled the plans of Qassim since, by strengthening Kuwaiti sovereignty it raised the price of invasion in terms of international law. Colonel Bowden, the Military Attaché to Iraq, believed a military move could be made by the Iraqi regime without affecting the internal security position. Trevelyan advised that Iraq should be left in no doubt that any military action on its part would be met with British force. Within two days the Embassy in Baghdad had changed its initial assessment of the significance of the press conference of Qassim from simply Iraqi political manoeuvring to potential military intervention in Kuwait.

British military plans for intervention in Kuwait to prevent an Iraqi invasion assumed that there would be four days advance notice of Iraqi ambitions. A paper produced by the War Office on June 9 outlined the signs that would highlight the possible imminent use of force by Iraq on Kuwait. Following an increase in political tension between Iraq and Kuwait indications would come from the movement of Iraqi armed forces. The deployment of the Iraqi army suggested that parts of the First Infantry Division, located to the south of Baghdad, were the most advantageously placed for moves on Kuwait. Parts of the Third or Fifth Infantry Division could also be used. Movement by infantry from Musaiyib, Diwabiya and Nasiriya to the areas of Basra and or Shuaiba by road or rail would be part of any Iraqi plan. An Iraqi invasion would also require tanks and artillery. Movements of Iraqi armour by road or rail towards the areas of Basra and Shuaiba would therefore be a clear indication of Iraqi intent as would any concentration of rail flats (used to move tanks by rail) or tank transports around Baghdad. The stationing or pre-positioning of fuel and military stores in the Basra-Shuaiba areas would be essential to any Iraqi operation. It was also anticipated that the movement of shipping in and out of the Port of Basra would be

restricted just prior to the use of military force. The War Office also predicted that the Iraqis were most likely to act between August and March.<sup>23</sup>

Great problems faced the British in assessing or determining these indicators. Military weaponry and personnel were likely to travel at night. Since success for any Iraqi military moves would depend upon speed and total surprise, military tactics would be well disguised. Britain had only a limited intelligence gathering operation in Iraq. This included the Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate in Basra. In these locations there would be the usual mix of Foreign Office and MI6 operatives. At this stage their role would be first to locate and then to report on the various activities, if any, that would be associated with any attempt by Iraq to invade Kuwait.

The reports that came out of Baghdad and Basra were of vital importance to decisions being made in Whitehall. On the night of June 27 the Consulate in Basra reported that there were no indications of any imminent Iraqi attack on Kuwait. Although there were rumours that some Iraqi troops had moved to Safume on the night of June 26 a reliable informant was unable to confirm such activity. There were no unusual movements or extra police operating in the area. The Iraqi fleet of torpedo boats stationed at Basra was constantly reported upon but there was no activity of an unusual nature. Flights to Kuwait from Iraq (that over-flew the frontier) were still operational and no restrictions had been made upon the aircraft of the Basra Petroleum Company.<sup>24</sup>

None of the reports from Basra showed any clear indications of Iraqi military moves upon Kuwait. Reliable sources reported that there had been no unusual numbers of troops or weaponry inside the main Basra barracks. All that could be reported were unconfirmed rumours of troops having moved from Divisional Headquarters to Shaiba Air Base. This report was given more substance by the arrival of the Garrison Commander at Shaiba, together with other officers, by civil airline.<sup>25</sup> None of this

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<sup>23</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156847: Memorandum for Foreign Office from War Office, June 9, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156847: Basra to Foreign Office, June 27, 1961, No. 45, 12.30a.m. sent July 28.

<sup>25</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156847: Basra to Foreign Office, June 29, 1961, No.46, 1.40p.m.: Pyman.

information provided a clear answer to the vital question of whether, and if so when, Iraq was going to attack Kuwait. The British Consulate in Basra could give no concrete indications either way. In a telegram sent to the Foreign Office, just hours before British troops arrived in Kuwait, Pyman argued that there was no evidence of any preparations for an attack on Kuwait. The problem remained that the nearness of the border to Iraqi barracks meant that a surprise attack could be undertaken without attracting much, if any, attention.<sup>26</sup>

The information from Baghdad was much more alarming, and it was reports from the Embassy in Iraq that led ultimately to the British decision to send troops to Kuwait. Like the consulate in Basra, the Embassy had no firm evidence of Iraqi troop or armour movements.<sup>27</sup> Trevelyan clearly reported this on the eve of British troops arriving in Kuwait. The earlier telegram giving detailed information had been based upon unconfirmed rumours and reports. Information on troop levels was based on these rumours and on the known strength of the Iraqi garrison at Basra. The information that convinced Trevelyan and the Foreign Office of the seriousness of Iraqi moves was of a covert nature. In an emergency telegram, on the morning of June 30, Trevelyan informed the Foreign Office of "unusual activity" in the Centurion Tank Regiment in Baghdad. Indications were that the tanks were being moved out by railway. The flash message also spoke of the possibility that some tanks had left during the night on railway flats. There were also unconfirmed reports of infantry movements during the night of June 29 suggesting that the Twentieth Infantry Brigade, three Divisions at Jaloula and possibly some paratroopers from Baghdad, had been moved south.<sup>28</sup>

It was not known what troops were already in the Basra region. Estimates suggested one infantry mobile brigade, an artillery regiment and a squadron of

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<sup>26</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156847: Basra to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961, No.52, 1.00a.m. sent July 1.: Pyman.

<sup>27</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156847: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961, No.703, 10.31p.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>28</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156875: Baghdad to Foreign Office, War office Distribution, June 30, 1961, No.690, 10.45a.m.: Trevelyan.

centurion tanks already in place with the rest of the regiment preparing to move out of Baghdad, along with some paratroopers, twelve Russian torpedo boats (with some Russian crews), and a limited amount of air support. The embassy advocated immediate air reconnaissance to be made of the area around Shaiba near the border with Kuwait to add confirmation of the rumours.<sup>29</sup> A few hours later a flash emergency telegram from the Military Attaché in Baghdad arrived for Cabinet distribution, (the Cabinet had been called to evening session to decide upon the Kuwaiti issue). The telegram from the British covert sources in Iraq announced that: "Alfa. Source close to G.O.C.1 [General Officer Commanding 1st Division of the Iraqi army] . . . reports tanks, troops and elements of 20th Infantry Brigade have been moved to Basra. Bravo. Remainder 1st Centurion Regiment still in Baghdad."<sup>30</sup>

Information continued to arrive from Baghdad on Iraqi forces. Reliable information indicated that the Commanding Officer of the First Centurion Tank Regiment was in Basra organising preparations for the arrival of his regiment. Although the evidence from Basra suggested that a military operation was not imminent other indications suggested otherwise. The political climate in Basra was one of expectancy with the Iraqi propaganda machine sowing seeds of apprehension in the region. Tension in Baghdad was even more heightened than in Basra.

The Political Resident, Sir William Luce, sent an assessment of the political and military situation in the region to London on June 29. Luce advocated a firm response in the form of military intervention in Kuwait. He believed that the public declaration of Qassim, whom he also characterised as being unbalanced and unpredictable, had bound him unequivocally to uniting Kuwait with Iraq. His opinion was that Qassim was in the process of building up his forces for an invasion and that his propaganda machine was setting up political support for this intervention. The report of an armoured regiment being moved towards the Basra-Kuwait border area meant that,

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<sup>29</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126875: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961, No.693, 1.39p.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>30</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156875: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961, No.700 9.38p.m. from Military Attaché, No. MA/IF/11A/11: Trevelyan.

with an infantry brigade already stationed at Basra, the Iraqis would be able to attack Kuwait within seventy-two hours. Luce also believed that affirmations of support by other Arab states for Kuwait would not dissuade Qassim from intervening, as he would have foreseen and discounted them. None of the Arab States could offer Kuwait military protection in time to stop an Iraqi invasion.

The British government remained consistent in its support for Sheikh Abdullah throughout the crisis. Messages of support were communicated to him from the Foreign Secretary, Lord Home who wrote that: "Her Majesty's Government wish to assure His Highness the Ruler of Kuwait and the Kuwaiti people of their support and sympathy in the present situation, and to re-affirm their determination to carry out all the obligations entered into in the exchange of Notes signed on June 19, 1961."<sup>31</sup> Lord Home was prepared for Sheikh Abdullah to publish this message of support if he felt it essential, but advised that it should not be published as it might be taken as a provocation by Qassim.

The British government was eagerly trying to win the propaganda war with Qassim and other critics such as Nasser and Radio Cairo. The weakened position of the British meant that this battle was essential. A strong diplomatic effort was therefore made towards Commonwealth and other states. Telegrams were sent from the Commonwealth Relations Office, as early as June 27, stating the familiar points of the British position and instructing British representatives to make full and vigorous use of them. This position was that Kuwait was an independent sovereign state and had been given diplomatic recognition by a number of states that had also voted for the admission of Kuwait to certain international organisations. Iraq had been one of the states voting for the admission of Kuwait as an independent and sovereign state to the ITU in 1959. Iraq had also spoken in favour of the admission of Kuwait to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on June 13, 1961. The British government had recognised the independence of Kuwait in a letter to the then ruler, Sheikh

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<sup>31</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Kuwait, June 27, 1961, 7.55p.m.



Mubarak the Great, on November 3, 1914. The letter had stated that: "the Sheikdom of Kuwait is an independent Government under British protection."<sup>32</sup>The British government also made clear that they were fully obliged and prepared to stand by Sheikh Abdullah. The Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, had stated unequivocally in the House of Commons on June 19 that the Exchange of Notes obliged Her Majesty's Government to aid the government of Kuwait if so requested.

On the evening of June 29 the Foreign Office instructed Richmond to approach Sheikh Abdullah and inform him that the latest information was that Qassim was preparing to make an early military attack on Kuwait. Richmond was told to urge Sheikh Abdullah to make a formal request for British military assistance under clause (d) of the Exchange of Notes.<sup>33</sup>The instructions given to Richmond were clear in that he had to obtain a request from Sheikh Abdullah:

**It is of vital importance to get the formal request from the Ruler for assistance as soon as possible. If possible this should be in writing, but if the Ruler is hesitant to do so, an oral request which you could then write down and to which the Ruler could give his assent would suffice. Please do your best to secure this as soon as practicable and report. At all costs however you should conduct the interview so that the formal request is made by the Ruler, even if this should only be oral.**<sup>34</sup>

In the early morning of June 30 Sheikh Abdullah requested the intervention of British armed forces into Kuwait. Far from requiring to be persuaded by Richmond, Sheikh Abdullah was anxious that British intervention should take place as quickly as possible and submitted a formal written request on the spot.<sup>35</sup>

**'His Excellency Her Majesty's Political Agent in Kuwait  
Greetings. In view of the military movements which have been undertaken by the Iraqi army on the borders of Kuwait and which are such as to threaten the security of Kuwait I have decided to submit a request for military assistance to Her Majesty's Government in accordance with the Note which I exchanged with Sir William Luce on June 19, 1961.I beg you to inform your Government of this**

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<sup>32</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Outward telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office, June 27, 1961.

<sup>33</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156874: Foreign Office to Kuwait, June 29, 1961, 6.40p.m.

<sup>34</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Kuwait, June 30, 1961, 2.35a.m.

<sup>35</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Kuwait to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961, 11.50a.m.

**immediately and I have full confidence Her Majesty's Government will adopt all measures and will muster their whole potential to ward off the aggressors. please accept my best wishes. May God preserve you.**

**Dated June 30, 1961**

**Abdullah al-Salim al Sabah**

**Ruler of Kuwait'.<sup>36</sup>**

On the morning of June 29 Lord Home made a statement to the Cabinet outlining the latest British position. He related the indications of an imminent movement of Iraqi tanks and armour into the Basra area estimating their readiness for an attack by July 1. He briefed the Cabinet that Trevelyan was at that moment informing the Iraqi Foreign Minister of British assurance of support for Sheikh Abdullah. Forces were on full alert with H.M.S. Bulwark ready to arrive off the coast of Kuwait on July 1. Aircraft had been moved from Aden to Sharjah and Bahrain and tanks were standing by in landing craft (LST) off Bahrain within twenty-four hours reach of Kuwait.<sup>37</sup> Unconfirmed accounts of Iraqi troop concentrations on the Kuwaiti border had also been reported in Cairo on June 29 and in Washington on June 30.<sup>38</sup>

The order to send troops into Kuwait was given on June 30, 1961, following the formal request from Sheikh Abdullah to the British government and a favourable decision at a special Cabinet meeting. The military plan put into action was the 'Reinforced Theatre Plan' code named Vantage. This had been set up by Air Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy in November 1960 when he had been Commander in Chief of Aden. Although already subject to criticism this plan remained the blueprint for the subsequent British military intervention.

Trevelyan advised that the British government should make it clear to Iraq that if its forces attacked Kuwait they would be met by British forces in strength with orders to resist any military incursions. He also suggested that, as part of the moves to deter Qassim from attacking Kuwait, Sheikh Abdullah should request a token force of Saudi Arabian troops. This would mean that Qassim would be faced with the need to fight Arab forces.

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<sup>36</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Kuwait to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961, 9.26a.m.

<sup>37</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156874: Statement of Secretary of State in the Cabinet, June 29, 1961.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Kuwait Crisis: Synopsis', Middle East Record, 1961, p. 118.

### **5.3.2 Multilateral diplomacy**

The tactics to be employed by Kuwait in the United Nations were of the utmost importance. The British government suggested to Sheikh Abdullah that Saudi Arabia should be encouraged to convene the Security Council in order to give the crisis a neutral rather than a Cold War status. Representations were made to the governments of India, Pakistan, and Turkey to try to get them to restrain Qassim. The United States was also approached in an attempt to get them to urge King Saud to use his influence on Iraq. The United Nations and the Security Council from the start were recognised by the British as being key instruments in the battle against Qassim. The lessons of Suez for the British were that clear legality in its position along with support from America and a large proportion of the United Nations were essential for success.

The British delegation to the United Nations, led by Sir Patrick Dean, was optimistic about convening the Security Council to the benefit of the Kuwaiti cause. He believed that this could be successful if trustworthy information about the military build up of the forces of Iraq against Kuwait could be presented before the Council. He also suggested that the Kuwaitis, who at this time did not have any representation at the United Nations, should send a suitable political representative. This move would help the Kuwaiti case before the Security Council both politically and administratively. Dean was also against the initiative being instigated by the Saudi Arabian delegation. The Saudi representative, Shukairy, at this time had a poor reputation and would in the opinion of Dean cause more harm than good. Dean also felt that Shukairy was likely to attack the British and possibly the Americans in the Security Council and to widen the diplomatic agenda which would risk escalating the issue into a Cold War debate. It was hoped that keeping the debate to the sole issue of Kuwait's international status would protect British interests in the Gulf from wider examination. Dean preferred an initiative to be made by the UAR, but it became clear that the only way for Britain to restrict the agenda in the Security Council to the issue of Kuwaiti membership was for

them to take the initiative in the United Nations.<sup>39</sup>One aspect of Britain's ability to retain its international influence was in its ability, by virtue of its membership as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, to set the agenda.<sup>40</sup>

The Security Council of the United Nations convened on Sunday July 2, 1961, at the request of the British delegation. This motion was reiterated by the Secretary of State of Kuwait, Bader Al-Mulla, who sent a letter to the President of the Security Council, also asking for an immediate meeting of the Council.<sup>41</sup>Britain supported this overture by Kuwait and in its capacity as a permanent member of the Security Council put forward the "Complaint" by Kuwait: "Complaint by Kuwait in respect of the situation arising from the threat by Iraq to the territorial independence of Kuwait, which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security."<sup>42</sup>

The representative of Iraq at the United Nations, Mr. Pachachi, had requested in a letter to the President of the Security Council that he be allowed to take part in the debate. With no objection from the other Security Council members he was allowed to take a seat at the Council table. Dean then read out a statement issued early the day before by the British government in London announcing the formal and urgent request of Sheikh Abdullah for Britain to send forces for the preservation of the political and territorial integrity of Kuwait. He went on to say that the British government hoped that force would not be needed and that British troops would be withdrawn as soon as the threat to Kuwait was removed. Dean argued persuasively and clearly the British and Kuwaiti position. Reference was made to the statements of Qassim, the Iraqi press and radio campaigns against Kuwait and the reports of Iraqi military forces moving into the Basra area. Dean also mentioned that the government of the UAR had concurred with British concern over the military position of Iraq. Although clearly

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<sup>39</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: New York to Foreign Office, June 29, 1961, 8.13p.m.

<sup>40</sup> For an interesting analysis of agenda setting in international organisations see: Stephen M. Saideman, "International Organisations and Secessionist Crises: The Relevance of Agenda Setting", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 17 (Spring 1994), 275-291.

<sup>41</sup> Finnie, *Shifting lines*, pp. 134-137; See Appendix 1.

<sup>42</sup> UN: SCOR: 957th meeting, July 2, 1961, 11.30a.m.: p. 1.

supporting Kuwait the remarks of Dean were also conciliatory towards Iraq. He concluded by stressing that Britain had no aggressive intentions towards Iraq and wished to remain on friendly terms with Iraq.<sup>43</sup> The Iraqi delegate to the United Nations, Pachachi, argued that Iraq had no intention of employing military means to resolve the dispute, but was only interested in peaceful means. He went on to deny reports of Iraqi troop movements in southern Iraq and label British military moves therefore as an act of aggression towards Iraq.<sup>44</sup> Pachachi continued to take the line that Kuwait was not and had never been an independent sovereign state.

The issue was again discussed by the Security Council on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of the following week. At the meeting of July 5, after some procedural bickering between the Soviet Union and Britain, the representative of Kuwait, Mr. Abdel Aziz Hussein, was invited to sit at the Council table along with the Iraqi delegate. Pachachi made it clear to the Council that Iraq viewed the "gentleman" (Kuwaiti representative) at the table as not representing a state but being present as a private individual.<sup>45</sup> Abdel Hussein outlined the Kuwaiti case explaining that: "Kuwait had progressively and systematically established all the requisite institutions by which a modern state is defined." Hussein went on to explain that de facto and de jure recognition had been given to Kuwait by various states of the world including Iraq. Letters were referred to in which Qassim had requested better transportation systems between the two countries and had asked at a later date for consular representation.<sup>46</sup>

The United States representative at the United Nations, Mr. Plimpton, spoke next, expressing the view of his government that Kuwait was a sovereign and independent state and the commitment of the United States to support the wish of the Kuwaiti people to remain independent and free. The UAR delegate, Mr. Loutfi,

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<sup>43</sup> UN: SCOR: 957th meeting, July 2, 1961, 11.30a.m.: pp. 3-7.

<sup>44</sup> UN: SCOR: 957th meeting, July 2, 1961, 11.30a.m.: p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> UN: SCOR: 958th meeting, July 5, 1961, 3p.m.: pp. 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> UN: SCOR: 958th meeting, July 5, 1961, 3p.m.: p. 13; Appendix 2.

followed Plimpton in the discussion. He spoke in support of Kuwaiti independence but called upon the problem to be solved within the framework of the Arab League.<sup>47</sup>

After further discussions by members of the Security Council and a subsequent meeting on Friday July 7 a vote was taken at 3.00 p.m. on the draft resolutions put forward by the British and the UAR delegates. The eleven members of the Security Council voted on both issues. The British resolution called on all states to recognise the territorial and independent integrity of Kuwait. The Security Council members voting in favour of the Resolution S/4855 were Chile, China, France, Liberia, Turkey, Britain and the United States. The Soviet Union voted against while Ceylon, Ecuador and the UAR abstained. The draft resolution was therefore not adopted because of the Soviet veto. The UAR draft Resolution S/4856 was then voted on. This resolution noted the statements of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti representatives and the many statements of Iraq that only peaceful means would be employed to reach a solution to the problem. The UAR resolution urged that the question should be solved by peaceful means and therefore called upon the British to withdraw its forces from Kuwait immediately. States in favour of this resolution included Ceylon, Soviet Union and the UAR with no votes against. Eight countries abstained namely Chile, China, Ecuador, France, Liberia, Turkey, Britain and the United States. The resolution did not pass because it failed to obtain seven affirmative votes.<sup>48</sup>

The position adopted by Iraqi delegate in the Security Council had been fully anticipated by the British. Trevelyan, writing to the Foreign Office, outlined that the only line of defence the Iraqis now had was in the political field in the Security Council. Qassim had been thwarted by British troops in Kuwait and by UAR moves in the Arab League. His only policy would be to try to refute the allegation that Iraqi troops had been moved to the Kuwaiti border. Trevelyan warned that Iraq would mobilise "Soviet, Arab and other anti-colonial support" to force the withdrawal of

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<sup>47</sup> UN: SCOR: 958th meeting, July 5, 1961, 3p.m.: p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> UN: SCOR: 960th meeting, July 7, 1961, 3p.m.: pp. 7-8.

British forces.<sup>49</sup>The Iraqis were unsuccessful in this approach apart from mobilising the Soviet Union's support.

Efforts were employed by Kuwait and the UAR to set up a framework for solving the episode within the jurisdiction of the Arab League. The British view of these efforts was initially sceptical. The concern was that an Arab League force could not offer the necessary military protection needed to deter an Iraqi attack.<sup>50</sup>The Soviet veto in the Security Council had effectively stopped any chance of a United Nations force being sent into Kuwait. This had some advantages for the British. Concern had been expressed by Luce that a precondition of a United Nations force being sent to Kuwait might have been British military withdrawal from the Gulf area. This would have undermined both the policy and the position of Britain in the Gulf. The British were aware that an effective solution guaranteeing the security of Kuwait other than by British troops would ultimately be needed. Trevelyan believed that the British government should "aim at a political settlement, in accordance with Arab ideas, which will provide an effective guarantee of Kuwaiti independence."<sup>51</sup>

The British response to the Iraqi allegations that no troops had moved in the period was hampered by the covert nature of the sources of information. The only substantive information on Iraqi military moves had been gathered from covert and not overt sources.<sup>52</sup>

**I regret that none of the military information which has been reported can be used publicly without risk of embarrassment to me and my source. In future, if any item of news can be used publicly, I will let you know; I suggest UK mission New York might stress the proximity of the frontier and the ease with which a surprise attack could be mounted.**<sup>53</sup>

The political tension in the Gulf, caused by the crisis, escalated as both reports came in of Iraqi troop movements and the Iraqi press, radio and government continued

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<sup>49</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Baghdad to Foreign Office, July 4, 1961, No.762, 11.51a.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>50</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156879, Bahrain to Foreign Office, July 7, 1961, No.422, 11.25p.m.: Luce.

<sup>51</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Baghdad to Foreign Office, July 4, 1961, No.763, 10.02a.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>52</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Baghdad to Foreign Office, July 4, 1961, No.765, 10.55a.m.: Trevelyan.

<sup>53</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Basra to Foreign Office, July 4, 1961, No.63, 11.45a.m.: Pyman.

to make belligerent statements.<sup>54</sup>Information came from Colonel Amjadi, head of the Iranian Savak organisation in Khorramshahr, that the Iraqi Twentieth Brigade had been deployed on the frontier and that elements of the Nineteenth Brigade had gone to Umm-Qasr. Artillery units had also been deployed to reinforce the frontier posts along the Shatt el Arab from Khosroabad to the sea.<sup>55</sup>

Macmillan had been pleased with the success of Operation Vantage, but he was aware of the mounting political pressure that would develop if there was a prolonged substantial British military presence in Kuwait. Such pressure had already started to emanate, from Cairo, for British withdrawal of forces.<sup>56</sup>Press reports in Cairo alleged that either the British had hatched up the whole affair in advance or that the British government had taken advantage of the situation to reassert its position.<sup>57</sup>

Arab nationalist opinion was now being redirected at its traditional target, the British. Reductions in the number of troops in Kuwait were therefore required to counterbalance this new political threat that was beginning to undermine public opinion within Kuwait itself. Consideration had been given by the Defence Secretary, Profumo, to building up a Kuwaiti force. Profumo believed the Kuwaitis would need a Brigade group for successful security including a regiment of tanks and modern fighter and reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>58</sup> Macmillan was unhappy with these proposals. His concern was over the practical problems of being able to establish such a force from the Kuwaiti population and the notorious political and military unreliability of Arab officers. Macmillan preferred the idea of a small British garrison being permanently situated in Kuwait with an airfield somewhat removed from Kuwait city.<sup>59</sup>

Lord Home wrote back to Macmillan arguing that a permanent British garrison in Kuwait would not be acceptable in the long run to Kuwaiti and Arab opinion. This

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>55</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156878: Two Telegrams: Tehran to Foreign Office, July 5 and July 7, 1961. No.786 and No.796.: Harrison.

<sup>56</sup> Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way: 1959-1961* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 385.

<sup>57</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156880: Cairo to Foreign Office, July 7, 1961, No.696, 12.16p.m.: Beeley.

<sup>58</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156883: Defence Secretary to Foreign Secretary, July 5, 1961.

<sup>59</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156883: Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary, July 6, 1961.



was also the view held by Luce.<sup>60</sup> He argued that keeping troops in Kuwait might also damage the position of Britain in the rest of the Gulf and might lead to pressure on Britain to withdraw from the Gulf area altogether. The more isolated Kuwait became from the rest of the Arab world because of the presence of British troops, the more dependent it would be on the continued military support of Britain. Kuwait would become perhaps more of a British protectorate than ever before and this would damage the claim to independent statehood that constituted its main diplomatic and legal bulwark against Iraq.<sup>61</sup>

Up to this point the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship had been a successful patron-client relationship. The al-Sabah ruling family had been able to achieve its desired internal autonomy and external security with the help of the British and the position of Sheikh Abdullah had remained firm and secure because of the relationship. In return, from the mid 1950s onwards, the British had received a flow of oil and financial support of sterling derived from extensive Kuwaiti investments. The intervention of patronal force on behalf of the client had been the ultimate way of securing the integrity of Kuwait. The problem and the concern was that this intervention had undermined the credibility of the al-Sabah ruling family. Too close a relationship with the British would damage the Kuwaitis and actually reduce their security.

On July 12 Kuwaiti Radio announced that three British battalions and some naval units would be withdrawn from Kuwait.<sup>62</sup> At this time the number of British troops in Kuwait numbered around 6,000 men. The reduction in the numbers of British troops to 3,500 was approved by the Cabinet during a meeting held at Admiralty House on July 18. This was the number that the Ministry of Defence felt to be the "irreducible minimum" at this point for the defence of Kuwait.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156883: Foreign Secretary to Prime Minister, July 14, 1961.

<sup>61</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156884: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 16, 1961: Luce to Stevens.

<sup>62</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156882: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 13, 1961: Richmond.

<sup>63</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156882: Defence of Kuwait: Discussion in the Cabinet, July 18, 1961.

An Arab League solution began to be taken more seriously by the British. Lord Home met up with part of the Kuwaiti delegation to the United Nations, Abdul Aziz Hussein and Sa'ud Fawzan, and discussed such a solution. Lord Home insisted that any force sent to Kuwait had to be capable of fending off a surprise Iraqi attack for between thirty-six to forty-eight hours so that reinforcements from the outside could be rushed in.<sup>64</sup> Abdul Hussein set off on a tour of Tunisia, Morocco and the Sudan to put forward the proposal of a force capable of holding up a surprise Iraqi attack for up to forty-eight hours. Consideration was again given to the possibility of building up the indigenous forces of Kuwait. Unfortunately, implementation of this proposal would take up to a year. This policy, combined with the decision to stockpile military equipment in Kuwait for British use in times of emergency, would mean British troops remaining in Kuwait for some time. This would cause mounting political pressures in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Middle East against the British. An Arab League force seemed to be the only possible solution, but one that would present problems for the British government. There was a possibility that the Arab League would lay down as one of the criteria for the force the abrogation of the Anglo-Kuwaiti Exchange of Letters of June 19, 1961.<sup>65</sup> Also the composition as well as the political direction of the force might be outside the control of either the British or the Kuwaitis. The difficulties of balancing Kuwaiti security with political harmony in the region presented a tricky diplomatic challenge for the British. For the Kuwaiti ruling family it was the old problem of juggling internal autonomy and external security.

On the day after the Exchange of Letters, Kuwait made an application to join the Arab League. Under Article 1 of the Arab League Charter any independent Arab State had the right to join the League. The membership of Kuwait had been supported by Saudi Arabia and Jordan and on June 23 the Council met to consider the application. Following the claim to Kuwait by Iraq the Council met to consider the position further. On July 20, 1961 it was put to the Iraqis that they either recognise the

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<sup>64</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156882: Foreign Office to Kuwait, July 14, 1961, No.803, 11.00p.m.: Home.

<sup>65</sup> See pp. 132-134 of this thesis for arguments on Kuwait joining the Arab League.

independence of Kuwait, register that recognition in the Arab League and the United Nations and drop their claim to Kuwait, or else the Arab League would set about producing a force that would be sent to Kuwait to replace the British troops. The Iraqi delegate walked out of the debate and the remaining members voted unanimously to admit Kuwait as a member.<sup>66</sup>

The Secretary General of the Arab League, General Abdul Khalik Hassouna, set about forming an Arab League contingent to replace the British forces. Any solution to the problem of the security of Kuwait would have to meet certain criteria set out by the British. The force would have to be an adequate deterrent to an Iraqi attack. The undertaking that Britain had given to Kuwait in the June 19 Exchange of Letters would still have to be maintained. The solution would also have to be acceptable politically to Kuwait such that it would not split Kuwait from the rest of the Arab world. The only solution that met all these criteria was an Arab League force.

### **5.3.3 Policy review**

British policy in the Gulf became the subject of a review in the wake of the intervention by British troops in Kuwait. Policy in the Gulf had been the subject of much debate within the Foreign Office after Suez. Sir Michael Wright and Sir Roger Stevens had both called for a change in the posture of Britain in the Gulf in 1956 arguing that the existing position was an "anachronism" in this area and that the small Sheikdoms should be brought into some kind of association with the Baghdad Pact. The Political Resident in the Gulf at that time, Sir Bernard Burrows, had defended the existing British disposition and called for a continuation of things as they were. Selwyn Lloyd, while Foreign Secretary, had set out policy in a dispatch of January 15, 1958, to Burrows. In this he had stated that any substantial change in British policy then would constitute an unacceptable risk. Sir George Middleton incorporated the views of the

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<sup>66</sup> Finnie, *Shifting lines*, p. 138; Appendix 4.

Foreign Secretary and the Political Resident with his conclusions that Britain would be unable to leave either easily or quickly from the Gulf.

Policy had recently been looked at by Sir William Luce when he had become the Political Resident in the Gulf in the middle of 1961. His judgement was that the relationship of Britain with the Gulf Sheikhdoms should be one of "adaptation" and not "transformation." Correctly, Middleton had previously suggested that it would be outside pressures and events rather than internal developments that would decide the future of the Gulf states. The threat from Iraq, the role of Egypt, the revolution in Syria and the stance of the Arab League was playing an instrumental role in developments in the Kuwaiti issue and thus reinforcing the validity of the comments of Middleton.

The Iraq-Kuwait crisis had added some troubling elements to the position of Britain in the region. The intervention in Kuwait had once again heavily committed Britain, politically and militarily in the Middle East. This was a reversal of the reduced political and military commitments of Britain in the rest of the world and went against the general pattern of its decline and reduction in power and influence. There were three main reasons for this paradoxical position.

First, the Sheikhdoms owed their survival as independent entities to the protection given by Britain. In the early years it had been the client-patron relationships with Britain that had secured these mini-states from being engulfed by the expansionist policies of the Persians and the Turks. After the First World War it was again the patron-client relationship that protected the Sheikhdoms from Saudi Arabia and later Iraq. Luce argued that in an age of self determination, on this issue alone, Britain had a moral obligation to protect these states and not allow them to be abandoned and absorbed by their more powerful neighbours.<sup>67</sup>

Second, the importance of the production and supply of oil, especially Kuwaiti oil, to Britain had provided an even weightier reason for maintaining the independence

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<sup>67</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain to Foreign Office, November 22, 1961, No.98: Luce.

of the Sheikhdoms. Inevitably the wealth created by the oil increased the desires of the Sheikhdoms more powerful neighbours to gain control over them. This, combined with the development of modern armed forces in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, had necessitated an increase in the size of British military forces required for the protection of the Sheikhdoms. The extent of the British liability was made all too evident when Iraq backed its claim to Kuwait with a direct military threat.

Third, British commitments had increased because they had failed to devise a political framework that would substitute security for purely military protection. As Luce put it: "Perhaps the main reason for our increasing involvement in the Persian Gulf has been our inability so far to devise any policy other than the exercise of military power to protect our interests in the area and to meet our treaty and moral obligations to the states."<sup>68</sup>

Two lesser reasons for the continued commitment of Britain to the Gulf included first, the lack of internal political development within the Sheikhdoms and second, the wishes of the Sheikhs themselves. A problem that Britain faced in creating a suitable political framework was the lack of political control that it exercised internally within the Sheikhdoms.<sup>69</sup> The patron-client relationship had limited the power that Britain had to shape internal policies and so had left it without the ability to foster political development in the ways it had adopted throughout colonial Africa. A key aspect of clientelism was that it left the client with a high degree of internal autonomy. Therefore Britain had no formal powers to impose administrative bureaucracies, democracy or judicial organisations. The much needed political, economic and social development in the Sheikhdoms could neither be prompted or set up by the British. All that they could do was to suggest and encourage the steps that would engender some form of political legitimacy for these anachronistic mini-states.

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<sup>68</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain to Foreign Office, November 22, 1961, No.98: Luce.

<sup>69</sup> Balfour-Paul, The End of Empire, pp. 108, 136.

Perhaps precisely because these democratic urgings had been ignored, the Sheikhdoms remained in the hands of families opposed to British withdrawal.

Combined with the vital economic interests that Britain had in the Gulf, these arguments remained powerful reasons for the continued engagement of Britain in the area. What was needed was an approach that combined a policy in keeping with the spirit of the times, kept stability in the Gulf and safeguarded British interests. If a policy could be found which met all these criteria then Britain could disengage militarily and politically from the region. Luce believed that no such solution could be found without some change in circumstances in the area. He wrote that "given Kuwait's geographical position, it is British and Western interests in the maintenance of her independence which is at the root of our present day position and commitments in the Gulf as a whole."<sup>70</sup>

The threatened annexation of Kuwait by Qassim could now be executed by Iraqi military intervention at any time without much or any warning. This presented a difficult military problem for the client-patron relationship. Sheikh Abdullah followed a three-pronged approach to the problem. First, knowing that only Britain could muster the necessary forces in time to thwart any Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he continued to hold Britain to the agreement signed on June 16, 1961, and thereby prolonged the patron-client relationship. Second, he promoted closer ties between Kuwait and the rest of the Arab world by joining the Arab League and through other diplomatic and financial manoeuvres. This was done because the British position was in decline and too close an alignment with them was politically dangerous for the ruling family. Third, he courted wider diplomatic support by applying for United Nations membership. Although the independence of Kuwait could only be maintained by the British military commitment in the Gulf, events had demonstrated to Sheikh Abdullah the need for Kuwait to court different patrons.

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<sup>70</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain to Foreign Office, November 22, 1961, No.98: Luce.

For the British the fulfilment of international obligations was very important. Britain would only withdraw from its agreement with Sheikh Abdullah if a suitable alternative could be found to guarantee the security of Kuwait and then only after giving three years notice. The Arab League force that had taken over from British troops in Kuwait had little military significance and was more important politically. Only a large and strongly balanced permanent Arab League force in Kuwait could guarantee the security of Kuwait. Saudi Arabia would probably be the only Arab state willing to do this and such a force could in itself represent a threat to the security of Kuwait. Iran would be the only other state geographically placed to be able to help guarantee some form of military security, but this would be politically unacceptable for Kuwait because Iran was a non-Arab state and any link would be provocative to Iraq. Some form of a United Nations force could be one possibility, but this was unlikely to take shape given the Soviet Union's negative attitudes in the region.

The general conclusion of this was summed up succinctly by Luce in his dispatch of November 1961:

**I am therefore to the conclusion that, so long as Qassim controls Iraq, Kuwait must rely on external military aid to secure her independence, that only HMG can effectively provide that aid and that the present Amir will expect them to do so. Equally, so long as Kuwait oil retains its present importance to Britain, it is in our interests to continue to bear this responsibility.<sup>71</sup>**

Even with careful strategic planning, Middle East developments outside the control of Britain would have a significant bearing on the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship and therefore the security of Kuwait. A static British policy towards Kuwait would be unprofitable because of many factors, including the Arab-Israeli question, the nature of the regime in Iraq, the potential spread of Communism in Iran and Iraq and the wider East-West confrontation. The weakened position of Britain and the uncertainties surrounding this area left policy makers looking only to the short term. The head of the Middle East Department, Sir Roger Stevens, agreed with the conclusions of Luce

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<sup>71</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain to Foreign Office, November 22, 1961, No.98: Luce.

about the difficulty of discerning future events. The Foreign Office believed that the best policy for the Gulf and Kuwait was to continue on the present course of guaranteeing the security of Kuwait.<sup>72</sup>

There would be problems with pursuing this course of action. The policy towards Kuwait would become increasingly difficult to maintain as Kenya reached independence (in 1963). Reinforcements of troops and aircraft from the Kenya base had formed a key part to the military plans for the security of Kuwait. With independence this base would be lost. The British undertaking given in the June 19 Exchange of Letters would therefore become more difficult and expensive. The Foreign Office was also concerned that access to Kuwaiti oil on favourable terms might be undermined by the Kuwaitis themselves. This was based on the belief that the favourable terms would be erased by the greater effectiveness of OPEC, in which Kuwait was a founder member, the reduced ability of the oil companies to deal with the oil producing states and the future desire of Kuwait to run its own oil industry demonstrated by the setting up of the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC).<sup>73</sup>

The newly formed OPEC organisation had already managed to halt the slide in oil prices. It was clear that this new organisation would soon be pushing for more power and a greater share in the profits for the oil states. The client-patron relationship was in the process of breaking down on both sides. Stevens rightly called for certain considerations to be taken into account:

**For these reasons alone we ought, I suggest, to be considering how to get out of our military obligations towards the Amir of Kuwait should we at any future time desire to do so. If we hope one day to shed these with safety and honour we are surely condemned to an unremitting search for political means of underpinning the independence of Kuwait.**<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Middle East: Foreign Office to Bahrain, December 10, 1961: Stevens to Luce.

<sup>73</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Middle East: Foreign Office to Bahrain, December 10, 1961: Stevens to Luce.

<sup>74</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Middle East: Foreign Office to Bahrain, December 10, 1961: Stevens to Luce.



The conclusion that can be drawn from these discussions over policy was that as soon as it became apparent that the economic and oil reasons for the position of Britain in the patron-client relationship were undermined, the British seriously considered withdrawal from their obligations. This shows that despite the breadth of the reasons given for the continuation of the position of Britain in the Gulf, the underlying reason was oil and finance and not Cold War strategic considerations. This substantiates the main argument of the thesis that the *raison d'être* of declining powers in their patron-client relationships moves from strategic to economic objectives. The other argument that can be drawn from the policy position of Kuwait and Britain at this time is that the client state will still seek protection from the client-patron relationship if its security environment remains insecure. Therefore, in the absence of any adequate formal security system in the region, the political independence of Kuwait continued to depend on the client-patron relationship with Britain. This did not stop Sheikh Abdullah from looking for replacements to the client-patron relationship.

The Gulf policy of Britain was now geared to and governed by its policy towards Kuwait. The maintenance of stability in the Gulf and the protection of oil supplies, lay at the heart of this policy, but seemed increasingly unattainable. In 1969, Sir William Luce commenting on British withdrawal from the Gulf wrote that: "The main question behind all this discussion is, of course, oil, and that is because since the Second World War, the Gulf region has proved to be the world's greatest known source of crude oil."<sup>75</sup> The lessons of the Kuwaiti crisis pointed to none of the Gulf Sheikhdoms being able to retain their independence after the withdrawal of British

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<sup>75</sup> William Luce, "A Naval Force for the Gulf", *The Round Table* 236 (October 1969), 348.

protection since the reasons for the vulnerability of Kuwait applied equally to the other Sheikhdoms. Threats could come from any of the big three states in the Gulf: Iraq, Iran or Saudi Arabia.<sup>76</sup> The vulnerabilities of the Sheikhdoms due to their small size and low population formed an intractable problem for the British. The reduction and decline in British power had removed any chance of Britain being able to impose any sort of federation on the Gulf Sheikhdoms. The internal security problems faced by each of the Sheikhdoms also would shape any attempt at political union. Geographically these mini-states were more accessible to Saudi Arabia than to each other. The political and military difficulties of any type of organisational pact would be near impossible without the inclusion of Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, Britain remained hostile and suspicious of Saudi Arabia. The Buraimi Oasis question and the war in Oman along with broken diplomatic relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia were the main reasons for this position. Saudi policy in Arabia and the Gulf was believed to be inimical to British interests. The dominant view in Whitehall was that the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia were "greedy expansionists."<sup>77</sup> Saudi Arabian military forces could get to within fifteen miles of the Burgan oil field in Kuwait without leaving Saudi territory. Iraq in contrast could only approach to within ninety miles of Kuwaiti town, before crossing into Kuwaiti territory. In a note responding to Richmond an official in the Foreign Office wrote that: "The very disarray into which the relations between Arab Countries have fallen, to which you have drawn attention, seems to me to make it dangerous to rule out the possibility of Saudi Arabia becoming the main threat to Kuwait's independence."<sup>78</sup>

The Foreign Office view was that any withdrawal from the Gulf would threaten the security of oil production and supply as well as stability, because of the probability of conflict and expansionism by the large states in the Gulf. Another crucial consideration

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<sup>76</sup> For an interesting analysis of the Gulf region's insecurities in the 1990s see: Zalmay Khalilzad, "The United States and the Persian Gulf: Preventing Regional Hegemony", *Survival* 37 (2) (Summer 1995), 95-120.

<sup>77</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156670: UK policy in the Persian Gulf.

<sup>78</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Kuwait, June 30, 1961.

in any British calculations was the East-West confrontation. Following on from their nineteenth-century policy of excluding foreign powers from the Gulf (Russia, Germany and Turkey), the British had been successful to this point in keeping the Soviet Union and Egypt out of the Gulf. Soviet penetration into the Gulf would undoubtedly increase with any British withdrawal as would the danger of the Soviet Union being able to stop Gulf oil flowing to the West.

Strategically, the British foothold in the Gulf was still a vital consideration in the East-West confrontation. The military and political relationships that Britain enjoyed in the Gulf was a vital bulwark to any determined Soviet moves into the area. The obvious strategic importance of the Gulf to the West, both in the East-West struggle and because of oil, prompted Luce to suggest that the United States should be more actively encouraged into supporting the position of Britain in the Gulf.<sup>79</sup>

The United States had been clear in its support of the British intervention in Kuwait and this was backed up by a general understanding and support of the British position. The Anglo-American alliance was operating successfully in the region. The United States remained for the moment content to leave Britain with the job of keeping the Gulf Sheikdoms stable and under Western control. Joint military planning with the United States in the Gulf was desired by Luce and Stevens. The British were warming to the idea of the Americans taking a more active role in the Gulf in addition to Iran and Saudi Arabia. This had been tried unsuccessfully in the past. The imperatives of the Cold War meant that the United States had to be persuaded about the dangers posed to Western security by the formation of a power vacuum in the Gulf. Reduced British power in the Gulf would be exploited by the Soviet Union. The United States, because the tensions in the Gulf and the Middle East region coincided with heightened East-West tensions in the wider world over Cuba and Berlin, remained in the background over the Kuwaiti issue.

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<sup>79</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126875: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961: Trevelyan.

The need for an analysis of the costs and the benefits of British policy in the Gulf prompted Macmillan to call upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of Power to prepare an assessment of the economic and financial considerations. Points were raised over the cost to Britain of its investments made in the oil industry in the Gulf. In 1961 this annual investment was estimated at around £67 million. The military industrial complex supporting the role of Britain as policeman in the Gulf (bases and forces in Cyprus, Libya, Aden, the Gulf and Kenya), was put at around a recurrent cost of £40 million.<sup>80</sup> There was also the risk that the oil policy of Kuwait could move against the interests of Britain, because of the need of Kuwait to keep in step with the other oil producers. It was the view of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister that the primary economic aim of Britain was to safeguard the production profits of the oil companies. A report on Kuwait came before the Cabinet on October 2, 1961, outlining the importance of its oil and finance to Britain. It was clear that Kuwait was of vital importance to the Middle East oil interests of Britain. The guaranteed supply of oil, the favourable effects on the sterling balances of British companies operating in Kuwait and the readiness of Sheikh Abdullah to receive and hold his royalties in sterling, were considerable advantages and benefits to Britain. A paper entitled "Kuwait and Middle East Oil" had been circulated on August 4, 1961, to the Future Policy Working Group of the Cabinet. In this paper an attempt was made to discern the total British economic interests at stake in the Middle East. It was calculated that if British companies were excluded from the Middle East, the cost to the balance of payments of Britain would amount to around £200 million a year.<sup>81</sup>

A more likely scenario was that British companies would still be able to operate but for a much reduced share of oil production profits. The cost of this to the balance of payments could be as much as £100 million per annum. British Petroleum (BP) had a half share of Kuwaiti Oil Company (KOC), while Shell purchased on good terms the majority of the half share of the American partner. The Middle East region was of

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<sup>80</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 126875: Baghdad to Foreign Office, June 30, 1961: Trevelyan.

<sup>81</sup> PRO: CAB 129/ 106: Kuwait, October 2, 1961, C. (61) 140.

overwhelming importance to BP, which in 1960 drew ninety-eight per cent of its supplies from the area and fifty-one per cent from Kuwait alone. The independence of Kuwait along with its close relationship with Britain acted as a counter balance against any further move for control of Middle East oil by one of the other three big producers (Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia). The independent status of Kuwait ensured that oil continued to flow on reasonable terms and in large quantities.<sup>82</sup>

The Foreign Office believed that the best way of protecting this economic interest was to help preserve the al-Sabah ruling family and an independent Kuwait and so continue the close relationship of co-operation between Britain and Kuwait, but a change in the terms of the concession agreement of KOC or a decision by the al-Sabah family no longer to hold substantial amounts of sterling could have effectively reduced the importance of Kuwait to Britain financially.

Due to negotiations between some of the Arab states and the importance of the United Nations in the Kuwaiti crisis, the Prime Minister felt that there might be a need to change the existing strategy of Britain. Macmillan realised early on in the crisis that Britain might have to accept either intervention by United Nations or Arab League forces. This might well have to be accompanied by a partial or a full withdrawal of British forces. He wrote that:

**It would be optimistic to assume that we should then indefinitely be able to have access to and control Kuwait oil on present terms. It would also be optimistic to assume that we should be able to repeat our recent military intervention, at any rate in anything like the same way. These considerations point to the need for an up-to-date assessment of our stake in the Middle East as a basis for an examination of how far we can, or should, adjust our military strategy for that area in the future.<sup>83</sup>**

Macmillan was keen that both the military and the financial considerations were fully explored before any decisions were made concerning the overall British strategy towards Kuwait.

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<sup>82</sup> PRO: CAB 129/ 106: Kuwait, October 2, 1961, C. (61) 140.

<sup>83</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3452: Draft minute from Prime Minister to Chancellor of the Exchequer, July 12, 1961.

#### **5.3.4 Military dimension of the crisis**

A number of problems faced British military commanders when planning intervention in Kuwait. The geographical isolation of Kuwait from large British military bases meant that troops could only be readily moved into Kuwait in large numbers at speed using air transport. Aden and Cyprus were closest at around 1,500 miles. The Cyprus base was handicapped by the new problem of the "air barrier". One of the effects of the Suez disaster had been to rule out air routes for the British military in the region. Permission had to be sought from various governments to overfly their territories.<sup>84</sup> This was no straightforward matter as was clearly demonstrated during the intervention of British forces in Jordan in 1958 when troops were flown from Cyprus over Israel. Permission was only granted at the last minute after aircraft had been fired upon by the Israeli Air Force and forced to turn back to Cyprus.

The air barrier over Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and at times Israel, Jordan and the Lebanon, meant that only two air routes were open to British forces West of Suez. The RAF could fly either over Turkey and then Iran to Kuwait from Cyprus or via the base at Libya, flying across the desert through Sudan. Even these two routes presented problems for the COS. Permission from Turkey for overflying was no mere formality. During the Kuwaiti crisis the refusal of Turkey, at first, to allow overflying put Operation Vantage in real jeopardy. The flight from Libya had to cross difficult terrain and was lengthy, adding to the time required for effective intervention. The proximity of Iraq to Kuwait along with the excellent terrain between the two states for tanks and armoured vehicles meant that speed of intervention was of the essence. East of Suez, British forces could be moved from Aden, Kenya, Bahrain, Nairobi, the Gulf and from the Indian Ocean. The distances to be covered by the military remained a formidable strategic problem for the British.

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<sup>84</sup> For analysis on overflying issues see pp. 112-113 of this thesis.

TABLE 5.1  
Distances to Kuwait from British Military Bases

To Kuwait from:-	In Miles:-
UK via Cyprus, Turkey, Iran	3,790
Cyprus via Turkey, Iran	1,770
Nairobi direct	1,940
Singapore via Gan	4,235
Aden via Shajah, Bahrain	1,560
Bahrain direct	225

Source : Adapted from: David Lee, Flight from the Middle East (London: HMSO, 1980), p.169.

The problem of overflying rights was to hamper the military plans of the British government throughout the 1960s. Joseph Salem commenting on British overflying in the late 1960s writes:

**There is one important limitation imposed upon air routes. Overflying rights are jealously stipulated and strictly observed and the situation is such today that overlying rights are largely denied to British military aircraft. A transport plane of the RAF proceeding eastwards from Cyprus must take one route only: north over Turkey and thence into Iraq, turning south near Tehran to descend towards Bahrain. No other route is at present politically possible. If Iran or Turkey were induced to deny Britain the right to fly over their territories, then the transport of troops to any point east of Suez would present a major problem in logistics and communications. This is a consideration with grave strategic implications even though the much needed longer Westward route across three oceans were freely available.<sup>85</sup>**

The shortage of troops and equipment also meant that Operation Vantage could jeopardise other potential operations. At this time political tension was mounting in Northern Rhodesia, the Congo and in Berlin. Any intervention of British troops to sustain law and order in Northern Rhodesia, under the plan code named Kingfisher, would need the entirety of RAF transport. These planes, vital for Operation Vantage, would be needed for up to six weeks to mount Kingfisher and then for an indeterminable period while troops remained in Rhodesia. Three Brigades would have to be assembled, mainly from Kenya, leaving Vantage dependent on units of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). Operation Fume was the plan for helping the Federal

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph Salem, "The Drama of US-Iraq Relations", pp. 66-67.

government keep stability and internal security in the Congo. This also competed for the resources required for the Kuwaiti operation.<sup>86</sup>

Diplomatic and moral support was sought from the United States at this important juncture. It had become part of British foreign policy, following Suez, to keep the United States fully informed about military moves in the Middle East. Thus the Americans were briefed about the belief in London that Qassim was preparing to reinforce his troops near the Kuwaiti border with a tank regiment. Rusk was informed by June 29th that the Iraqis could reach Kuwait by July 1. Once the Iraqi forces were positioned in the Basra area there would be no warning of an attack. Lord Home asked on June 29 whether the United States government could be counted upon to give its full political backing to Britain if force had to be used in Kuwait. A meeting was held of the United States National Security Council on June 29, 1961 in which the issue of Kuwait was discussed. The Kennedy administration clearly understood the importance of Kuwait to the West.

**The Secretary of State opened a discussion of Kuwait by saying that the situation was critical and that decisions might be called for. . . . There was a brief but careful discussion in which the great interests of the West in Kuwait were noted, and there was concurrence in the view that the Secretary of State could give reassurance to Lord Home on both points. . . . [Action memoranda 2431] Noted the President's approval. . . that the United States give full political and logistical support, if required to the United Kingdom in connection with certain actions it is taking to forestall any Iraq attempt to take over Kuwait by force.<sup>87</sup>**

Rusk telephoned and sent a telegram assuring Lord Home that his government would indeed give its full political support for such a move. Rusk also agreed with the British request to a combined approach between their two countries' missions in the United Nations on the Kuwaiti question.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156874: Military preparations for intervention in Kuwait, Walmsley, June 26, 1961: Walmsley.

<sup>87</sup> JFKL: NSC Meetings and Memoranda Series: Memorandum for Record, Discussion at NSC Meeting June 29, 1961.

<sup>88</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156874: Washington to Foreign Office, June 29, 1961, No.1596: Caccia.



The possibilities of military support was also discussed between Rusk and Lord Home. At the time of the last crisis over Kuwait during the Iraqi revolution of 1958 the then Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had agreed to offer support to Britain. Dulles had been prepared to occupy parts of Saudi Arabia if necessary and had urged Lloyd to be ready to take control of Kuwait and the other oil fields of the Gulf. At that time it had been agreed that if Britain were obliged to occupy Kuwait then America would lend the British their full support. Subsequent joint Anglo-American military planning in the Gulf had not, however, run the smooth course that the British had hoped for. The United States government had been reluctant to discuss military planning in the area and no commitment had been made by them to the British government after the emergency in July 1958.<sup>89</sup> A commitment to morally support a British resort to force had, however, been given.

It was therefore reassuring for the British when the Chief of Defence Staff, Mountbatten, was given information by Admiral Page-Smith on June 29, 1961, about the United States forces that might be available in the region to assist in any British expedition into Kuwait. Admiral Page-Smith offered a squadron of United States Navy Alpha Delta long-range propeller aircraft that could be flown from their carrier to the Gulf and could then operate from bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Turkey or Iran. He also offered a battalion of 2,100 Marines from the Sixth Fleet which at this point was in Sicily, but these could be transported by air at short notice to the Gulf. The United States also had forces that could be moved from Germany at short notice. These included two airborne battle groups, two squadrons of fighters, a squadron of interceptors and a squadron of reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>90</sup>

None of these forces at this time had been alerted. On July 1 Rusk called the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Harold Caccia, and made an offer of military support from the United States Naval Force at sea off the African coast near

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<sup>89</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156874: The Possibility of Assistance from the United States in Defending Kuwait, June 27, 1961: Walmsley.

<sup>90</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Information Conveyed by General Code, Secretary of CoS, June 30, 1961.

Mombassa. This force, code-named Solent Amity, was made up of two destroyers, one small craft, one LST (with equipment but no tanks on board) and 500 United States Marines. Rusk informed Caccia that this force could reach Bahrain to join the other two American destroyers there by July 5 and sought the opinion of Britain on its despatch, since the State Department was concerned about despatching forces to an area where there was no specific United States commitment.<sup>91</sup>

The offer was discussed by Macmillan and the Cabinet the next day. By this time the question was whether Qassim would still attack even with a British force in place. Over the next few days British forces would still face a superior Iraqi force. If the Iraqis were to attack then United States forces close by in Bahrain would be very useful to British operations. If there was no attack the West would be left with a political problem. The presence of Solent Amity in the northern Gulf could be perceived and presented by Arabs and Soviets alike as part of a Western imperialist manoeuvre. So Macmillan asked the Americans to allow Solent Amity to continue on its course for the next twenty-four hours or so at which point the situation would be reviewed. Macmillan also asked that one of the United States Destroyers presently in the Gulf should go to the northern part of the Gulf and act as a reconnaissance vessel looking out for Iraqi maritime activity. In particular the British were concerned about the twelve motor torpedo boats at that moment based at Basra. The Naval forces of Britain in the area at that moment were stretched and despatch of an extra Destroyer from Aden to Bahrain was of great help.<sup>92</sup>

Plans for intervention in Kuwait by the British had been in existence for some considerable time. The Joint Planners Committee of the three services had been due to meet on July 5 to implement the revised plan Operation Bellringer in place of Operation Vantage. There had been careful planning to ensure that many of the vital elements needed for the operation were in place in and around Kuwait because for reasons of weight and size these logistics would be the hardest to move into the area at

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<sup>91</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3428: Washington to Foreign Office, July 1, 1961: Caccia.

<sup>92</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3428: Foreign Office to Washington, July 2, 1961.

speed with the strategic reserve. The pre-positioning of these elements meant that only troops and their lighter equipment remained to be moved into the area. These vital logistical provisions included eight Centurion tanks with operating and maintenance personnel and equipment. These tanks were kept in an LST which was permanently on station in the Gulf (at the time of Operation Vantage was at Bahrain) with the ability to reach Kuwait in four days. Within Kuwait eight Centurion tanks were maintained by the Kuwaiti army so that they could be available for immediate use by British forces. Three Whirlwind Helicopters, owned by the Kuwaiti government and operated by a British charter company, were to be placed at the disposal of the British, along with a number of Auster light aircraft of the Kuwaiti flying club. The Kuwaiti government, the Kuwaiti army and KOC had promised 688 "B" type vehicles (Land Rovers, three-tonners, lorries, trailers etc.) for the British forces. Drinking water and petrol was to be available in vast quantities in Kuwait for the intervening forces. Plans had also been made for certain buildings to be put aside for the British for living and storage accommodation.<sup>93</sup>

There were three vital bonuses to the operation: the stockpile at Bahrain, KOC and the extra forces available in the Gulf. The stockpile of military equipment held at Bahrain, which could be moved to the Kuwaiti theatre within thirty hours steaming by supply ships or ninety minutes flying time of transport aircraft, contained "B" type vehicles, Saladins, Ferrets, 'Twenty-Five' pounder guns, ammunition, rations and POL (Petrol, oil and Lubricants). The close proximity of this stockpile to the "hot zone" was a logistical bonus. The KOC provided invaluable help to the British forces and to the whole operation throughout. The oil company, partly owned by the British government, provided facilities and amenities to the British forces that smoothed the whole operation through. The KOC had an extensive network of VHF radio telephones which they lent to the British army. This means of communication proved the most reliable in contact between the Joint Administrative Headquarters (JAHQ)

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<sup>93</sup> PRO: WO 32/ 20721: Army Operational Research Group report on Operation Vantage, completed August 1961: D.F. Bayly Pike.

and '24th' Brigade Headquarters.<sup>94</sup> British forces available in the Gulf region at the time of the crisis were better than usual. The Commando ship H.M.S. Bulwark, with most of '42' Royal Marines Commando and parts of Headquarters Three Commando Brigade on board, was in the vicinity at Karachi. This ship was on route to undertake hot weather trials in the Gulf and was due to arrive in Kuwait on July 6. <sup>95</sup>It was given new orders at midnight on June 28-29 to sail towards Kuwait, but to remain out of sight of land.<sup>96</sup> Steaming at twenty-four knots, H.M.S. Bulwark arrived within twelve miles of the new airfield in Kuwait on July 1 at 11.17 a.m. There were also twice the usual number of Centurion tanks available in the Gulf because the operation had coincided with a changeover of the eight tanks stationed at Bahrain (the normal contingent).<sup>97</sup> The eight Centurion tanks held in Kuwait were quickly put in position on July 1.

The operation ran into trouble from the outset over the overflying and air landing facilities. Turkey and the Sudan refused overflying permission and the Commander in Chief of the operation, Sir Charles Elsworthy, was faced with entering Kuwait and securing the airport without the Parachute regiment earmarked for this operation from Cyprus. Elsworthy had little choice but to enter Kuwait on July 1 with just '42' Commando, one squadron of Carabiniers and two squadrons of Hunter aircraft. Lee wrote that this development "took both Whitehall and the Middle East Command completely by surprise."<sup>98</sup>

The decision was taken to change the operational plan. The modification decided upon was to give priority to the "teeth" fighting units. Men with personal weapons and light equipment were to reach Kuwait as soon as possible at the expense of freight and administrative units. Although this meant that a large number of fighting

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<sup>94</sup> PRO: WO 32/ 20721: Army Operational Research Group report on Operation Vantage, completed August 1961: D.F. Bayly Pike.

<sup>95</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Kuwait, June 27, 1961.

<sup>96</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3427: Foreign Office to Baghdad, June 28, 1961.

<sup>97</sup> David Lee, Flight From the Middle East (London: HMSO, 1980), p.171.

<sup>98</sup> Lee, Flight, p.174.

forces arrived in Kuwait in a very short space of time, their actual battle readiness was very much reduced by the lack of administrative co-ordination and command and control.

Within forty-eight hours British forces had entered Kuwait in sufficient force to deter any potential Iraqi attack. The operation was without doubt a political success for Britain and Kuwait. Its success meant that the British Cabinet did not in fact review the state of British forces deployed for the Kuwaiti theatre until September 1, 1961. The pre-positioned equipment in Kuwait included twenty-four tanks, twenty four armoured cars (sixteen Saladin and eight Ferrets), twelve field guns, engineering equipment, heavy vehicles, ammunition, aircraft rockets and mobile radar type "t". Adequate technical personnel were left in Kuwait to maintain this equipment. In the Bahrain and Sharjah area military personnel and equipment included one parachute battalion, one armoured squadron, one armoured car squadron, one parachute light battery, a detachment of Hunter G.A.9s and Beverleys, Twin Pioneers and a few Pembrokes. In Aden, forces deployment for Kuwait included one infantry battalion, a regimental headquarters, one armoured squadron, one field battery, one troop of field engineers, Hunter G.A.9s, Shackletons, four Hastings (detached from NEAF transport force) and four Brittannias. In Kenya forces earmarked for the Kuwaiti operation included a brigade headquarters, two infantry battalions, a regimental headquarters, one field battery, a field squadron less one troop, brigade administrative units, and a number of Beverleys. West of the air barrier forces on standby for a return to Kuwait included one Canberra squadron in Germany, and two in Cyprus and, in Britain, four Brittannias on twenty-four hours notice.<sup>99</sup>

The conclusions and lessons to be drawn from the military viewpoint were extensive. Clearly, properly trained and equipped military forces directed under the right operational plan were a necessity for the continued security of Kuwait. The recognised problems of moving forces to this distant military theatre as well as the

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<sup>99</sup> PRO: CAB 129/ 106: Kuwait: Memorandum by Minister of Defence, September 1, 1961, C (61) 133.

sustainment of those forces once they had arrived was clearly shown up in Operation Vantage. This operation had many similar problems to those experienced in Operation Desert Storm of 1990-1991. Jeffrey McCausland offers a useful military analysis of the Gulf Conflict that can be used as a basis for understanding British military intervention in July 1961.<sup>100</sup>

In Operation Vantage although a large number of fighting units were moved in quickly into Kuwait some of them were ill equipped to fight the Iraqis. Many of the units were relying on local transport for strategic mobility in the field. The great failure of the Kuwaitis to meet the agreed transport plans and needs of Operation Vantage meant that, had some of the British forces been forced to fight anything but a static defensive battle, they would have been incapable of doing so.

The lack of definite real-time intelligence was also a problem for both the military and the politicians. This aspect of the crisis as already mentioned has remained the most controversial. The government documents do not mention the use of aerial reconnaissance in the assessment of the Iraqi threat. Alani writes that: "there [was] no evidence to suggest that the RAF intelligence gathering capability was put into use before British forces landed in Kuwait."<sup>101</sup> There were also large problems of command and control of forces within the field area. The decision to give priority to fighting units with personal weapons and light equipment was partly responsible for the massive breakdown in the strategic communications of the British forces. In the operations plan it had been assumed that the civil airport would be shut to commercial traffic and would be at the disposal of British forces. Unfortunately, from the operations perspective, civil aircraft continued flying into Kuwait throughout the crisis and the British forces therefore had to fly into the new airport at Magwa. This airport was far from completed and had no unloading or refuelling facilities. Fighting troops arriving on Britannias had to leave by the emergency chute. A lack of administrative

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<sup>100</sup> Lt-Colonel Jeffrey McCausland, "The Gulf Conflict: A Military Analysis", Adelphi Paper 282 (London: IISS, 1993).

<sup>101</sup> Alani, Operation Vantage, p.109.

manpower in Kuwait to deal with the incoming military supplies meant that many vital supplies were either lost or were taken back on the aeroplanes back to Bahrain and the troops guarding the runway became unofficially used for unloading aircraft. An example of the detrimental effect that the administrative and tactical problems had on the efficiency of British forces was the '29th' Field Royal Artillery, that nine days after the start of the operation was still without its wireless sets, batteries and charging engines. So many units were without their vital supplies that hundreds of 'flash' messages were sent on the communications network. The effect of this was to completely clog up the communications network. Important messages were held up for days on end as a result. Command and control of British forces had to be done on an ad hoc basis in the operations area.

The British Commander had been given certain rules of engagement to deal with an Iraqi attack. Authorisation was given by the Cabinet for the Commander to extend air attacks into Iraq to a depth of fifteen miles towards ground forces. If the Iraqi air force attacked authorisation was given to engage in hot pursuit back to the Iraqi bases where they could be destroyed on the ground using rockets or guns, but not bombs.<sup>102</sup> These restrictions were influenced by the strategic view of the politicians and military commanders in London. The strategic view was based on experience accumulated over many years, and the politicians and the military were especially influenced by the Second World War and the Suez campaign. At Suez they had seen military victory turn into political defeat. They were also sensitive about the need not to be seen as acting as an imperialistic power. Britain had controlled Iraqi rebels during the British mandate by using the RAF to bomb villages and towns. Bombing as a weapon was a tool that the politicians preferred not to use because of the effect it could have on Arab and world opinion.

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<sup>102</sup> PRO: WO 32/ 20719: Flash message from Ministry of Defence, London to CINC MIDEAST, Bahrain, July 3, 1961.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The exclusive agreement between Britain and Kuwait was abrogated on June 19, 1961. Within twelve days of this announcement British troops had entered Kuwait at the request of Sheikh Abdullah to combat the threat of military annexation of Kuwait by Iraq. Qassim had instigated the political crisis on June 25 when he gave a press conference voicing the historical Iraqi claim to Kuwait. The ensuing events changed the political and security map of Kuwait fundamentally and forced a close review of British policy. The crisis of June-July 1961 represented the most important and dangerous moment in Kuwaiti history between the signing of the 'Bond' in 1899 and the Gulf War of 1990-1991.

The 1961 crisis became a focus of political and later of historical debate. The question of whether Iraq really did move military forces towards the border in readiness for an invasion and whether there was an actual threat to the political and territorial integrity of Kuwait has been discussed at length by many writers.<sup>103</sup> Alani argues that Qassim never intended to invade Kuwait and was more interested in the "disruption of the new Anglo-Kuwaiti alliance" than annexation. He goes on to say that Qassim's statements did not clearly indicate the intention of using force to "liberate this section of Iraqi territory."<sup>104</sup> Bulloch takes a similar line claiming that the Kuwait intervention was an operation "contrived" by the War Office that wished to test out its new rapid deployment force in the Gulf.<sup>105</sup> There is good cause to dispute the analyses of Alani and Bulloch. First, there were a number of reasons why Britain would have preferred not to have had a crisis in its relations with Iraq. Britain had extremely important assets in the Gulf region, particularly in Kuwait and Iraq. The two major

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<sup>103</sup>Penrose, Alani, Bulloch and Chubin take the view that Iraq's threats were more political than military in 1961: Edith and E. F. Penrose, Iraq: International Relations and National Development (London: Ernest Benn, 1978), pp. 276, 293; Chubin, Security, p. 27; Alani, Operation Vantage; Bulloch, The Persian Gulf Unveiled; Ibrahim and Kelly take the view that Iraq massed troops on the Kuwaiti border ready to invade: Ibrahim, Ibrahim ed., The Gulf Crisis: Background and Consequences (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1992), pp. 8-9; John B Kelly, Arabia, the Gulf and the West (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 284.

<sup>104</sup> Alani, Operation Vantage, pp. 74, 76.

<sup>105</sup>Bulloch, The Persian Gulf Unveiled, pp. 62-65.



British oil companies, BP and Shell, extracted the bulk of their oil from this region. Any sustained military operation in this region far from securing the production and supply of oil, which was the main policy objective of the British, could actually have led to disruption and instability of the oil supply. Concern was expressed in Whitehall over the possible measures that Qassim was likely to take against Britain in Iraq. These included nationalisation of the Basra Oil Company and the freezing or sequestration of British assets. At this time delicate negotiations were taking place between IPC and the Iraqi government. The cost to British business and to the all-important balance of payments would have been high. British interests in Kuwait were more important than those it had in Iraq. Sending British troops into Kuwait also raised important political and financial considerations. The extensive sterling deposits held by Sheikh Abdullah might easily have been withdrawn in response to an Arab nationalist propaganda attack while the political settlement in Kuwait after British troops withdrew could have damaged British vital interests. It is true that one of the main reasons Britain intervened was to safeguard British assets. The Macmillan government was also well aware that this action could have jeopardised the very interests that it was intended to protect. It is inconceivable that British military interests in 'testing out Operation Vantage' would be allowed to circumvent interests financially worth in the estimated region of annually £300 million.<sup>106</sup>

The war-game hypothesis is rendered all the more implausible by timing. Strategically, Operation Vantage came at an inopportune moment, with east-west relations were becoming increasingly problematic as political tension rose over Berlin. The Chiefs of Staff were worried about dangers posed throughout the world by the Cold War. After Suez and the Sandys Defence cut, British military forces were at full stretch. At a time when British forces might have to be used at short notice to fulfil a NATO role in Berlin, to intervene in the Congo or in Rhodesia, only the most urgent military necessity could have justified the use of some 6,000 British troops, the bulk of

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<sup>106</sup> Luce writing in 1969 put the figure contributing to Britain's balance of payments at around £200 million a year. Luce, "A Naval Force", p. 348.

the aircraft of Transport Command and substantial numbers of fighter aircraft, tanks and Royal Navy Ships in an extended exercise.

Besides, intervention carried enormous political risks. Sir Anthony Eden had been politically destroyed by a botched Middle East intervention. The slightest hint of British imperialist ambitions would have opened up a whole volley of attacks from nationalist forces. By intervening, the Macmillan government was drawing world and Arab attention to an area where close observation was not in British or Kuwaiti interests. Inevitably the Arab infighting would cease and the disparate factions would unite in an attack on the easy target of the British. There was also the electoral danger of having British troops in the firing line. British casualties in a war fought far away in an Arab mini-state would have been difficult to justify to a critical House of Commons and electorate.

Had it been discovered that Britain had contrived an Iraqi threat to Kuwait then British credibility would have been severely undermined. In the United Nations and the Middle East, Britain could have faced a diplomatic catastrophe similar to Suez if such an allegation had been credible. At a time when British policy was to roll back its own colonial past, an imperialist adventure in Kuwait did not make historical, political or common sense.

The recently released government documents tell a different story to that told by Alani and Bulloch. The files show that the British government was convinced that Iraq was on the verge of invading Kuwait. Influential voices in the Middle East such as Sir William Luce and Sir Humphrey Trevelyan advised the Foreign Office that there were indications that Iraq was about to invade Kuwait. Covert sources in Baghdad and Basra reported movements of Iraqi troops and armour towards the border. There was uncertainty about the nature and extent of the threat that Iraq posed, but the political and military information coming from Iraq suggested that intervention in some form was imminent.

Alani bases much of his argument on discussions with the Political Agent in Kuwait, Richmond. Both he and Bulloch state that Richmond was not supportive of

British military intervention in Kuwait and saw no evidence of a direct Iraqi threat. Alani also makes out that the British government instructed Richmond to secure from Sheikh Abdullah a request for British military intervention.<sup>107</sup> The Foreign Office did indeed instruct Richmond to get the request of Sheikh Abdullah for British intervention. Yet, according to the account given by Richmond, the ruler had pre-empted his instructions from Whitehall and had already requested British intervention. That the British should have taken the initiative to prompt Sheikh Abdullah to request intervention formally is in any case poor evidence that they were manufacturing the crisis. It is consistent with their acute sensitivity to the difficulty of establishing the legality of their action and securing good public relations should the crisis develop into an armed conflict with Iraq, given the strength of Arab nationalist sentiment in Kuwait and the Middle East and of anti-colonialist feelings in the United Nations and the United States. The dovishness of Richmond is understandable because he would have been fully aware of the potential dangers that British intervention could have had for the position of Britain in the Gulf and because he, like Sheikh Abdullah, was very much in the dark over Iraqi troop movements. The Agency was limited in its ability to gather intelligence information and Richmond along with the government of Kuwait was dependent upon London for information. In a letter to the Foreign Office Richmond wrote: "As you know, I had hoped it would not have been necessary to obtain the Ruler's request for help until evidence of Iraqi build-up was stronger. But now that he has asked for our help it would be most damaging here if nothing arrived."<sup>108</sup>

The facts that faced Macmillan and his Cabinet were that Qassim had made a clear and unambiguous claim to Kuwait and that the radio and press in Iraq had launched a vitriolic campaign against Kuwait calling for military intervention. These heightened political tensions were backed up with rumour, gossip and unconfirmed reports of Iraqi troop movements. It was not until covert secret intelligence reports from Baghdad arrived in Whitehall informing of troop and armour movements that the

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<sup>107</sup> Alani, *Operation Vantage*, p. 179.

<sup>108</sup> PRO: PREM 11/ 3428: Kuwait to Foreign Office, July 1, 1961 2.20a.m.: Richmond.

green light was given for intervention. These reports were sent direct to London and, from there, were copied only to the British Embassy in Washington and the British delegation to the United Nations.

Intervention had to be on a completely legal basis. The request of Sheikh Abdullah for help had to be obtained before the operation could be mounted. The Foreign Office was also quick to announce that British forces would leave Kuwait as soon as Sheikh Abdullah requested it. This policy was linked to legitimacy in the UN and the support of the United States. The lessons of Suez were dominating the style of British action overseas. It also showed that the British were still prepared when necessary to take steps to secure their vital economic interests. The security of oil supplies was the dominant factor in this decision making process. The economic health of Western Europe was dependent upon the free flow of cheap oil from the Middle East. Kuwait by 1960, was the third largest oil producer in the world and had a quarter of known world oil reserves.<sup>109</sup>

British policy in Kuwait was also linked to the wider issue of the position of Britain in the Gulf. British credibility was at stake. Any retreat over Kuwait would have put the British position throughout Arabia at risk. Operation Vantage was the largest and most noticeable intervention by the British in the Gulf during this period. Military force had been used in Oman, Bahrain, Aden and the small Gulf Sheikhdoms to deal with local revolts. This investment would have been ruined had the British not fulfilled their obligations under the Treaty signed on June 19, 1961, allowing the power balance to swing dramatically in the favour of Iraq. As Elizabeth Monroe points out: "For some time before the collapse at Aden, there had been discussion of abandoning defence expenditure 'east of Suez', but always the sanctity of long-standing treaties with Gulf rulers had stood in its way."<sup>110</sup>

The extent of the forces earmarked for the Kuwait represented an important military commitment. The size and scale of forces needed to effect an immediate

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<sup>109</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, p.107.

<sup>110</sup> Monroe, *Britain's Moment*, p. 215.

intervention in Kuwait was a large burden on already stretched military resources. The need for these forces was also welcomed by the various branches of the military who were at this time in the process of having to justify their force levels. The defence of Kuwait had been partly secured by units arriving from Kenya. It was unlikely that Kenya could be used as a British military base after the end of 1962 (with its proposed independence). The need to provide accommodation for these forces moving from Kenya to the Gulf was set out in the Kuwait report to the Cabinet in September 1961.<sup>111</sup>

TABLE 5.2  
The Estimated Annual Cost of Maintaining Forces in the Persian Gulf Region

Forces	1962-1963 Cost £mill	1966-67 £mill
3 Frigates & Amphibious Squadron	1.1	1.0
8 Army Units in Aden and Gulf	8.3 (Includes Aden Federal Army)	19.0 (Includes £1.2 mill for temporary accommodation)
RAF in Aden and Gulf	5.8	8.15
TOTAL	15.2	28.15

Source: Adapted from: PRO: CAB 129/ 106: Kuwait, October 2, 1961, C (61) 140.

The military difficulties of mounting another intervention into Kuwait had increased due to the new assessment of Iraqi capabilities. The emergency of July 1961 had demonstrated the military difficulty of mounting an intervention in Kuwait. The air barrier, the steady depletion of British forces in the Middle East theatre, the potential political and diplomatic pitfalls of joint Anglo-American action, the impending loss of Kenya and new assessments of Iraqi capabilities and of the speed with which Iraq could overrun Kuwait all drew attention to the ever greater difficulties that would attend any subsequent intervention. It was estimated that substantial forces would have to be deployed within thirty-six hours. Britain was still in a position to guarantee the security of Kuwait, although the cost of doing so with a weakening British economy was appearing more and more prohibitive.

<sup>111</sup> PRO: CAB 129/ 106: Kuwait, October 2, 1961, C (61) 140.

The patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait had been tested to the limit with the intervention of British troops in the Summer of 1961. The relationship was undergoing a period of fundamental change. The declining power of Britain meant that Kuwait was seeking a different type of client-patron relationship with Britain and ultimately some other political and security relationship to replace the former agreement. For the British the flow of goods and services coming from the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship was so important that other means would have to be sought to guarantee their continuation. Therefore, the British military obligation to Kuwait was continued as it was still in the interests of both states.

## **5.5 : Appendix.**

### **Appendix 5.1**

a. Letter from General Qassim to the Ruler of Kuwait, dated September 7, 1958, and signed General A Qassim, Prime Minister of the Iraqi Republic.

**His Highness, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salam Al-Sabah, Ruler of Kuwait: I have received your letter dated 12 August 1958, and I thank Your Highness for the brotherly feelings which have been expressed by you towards Iraq. I wish to inform Your Highness with great pleasure that instructions have been directed to the concerned Iraqi officers to free the transportation between our two countries.<sup>112</sup>**

b. Letter to the Ruler of Kuwait, from Secretary of State, dated December 29, 1958.

**It gives me a great honour to inform you that the Iraqi Republic is always keen about maintaining and fostering close and co-operative relations with the sister Arab countries, and feels it her duty to co-operate with her dear neighbour Kuwait to establish a new foundation of friendship and brotherhood with Kuwait. The Iraqi Government believes the best way to accomplish such ends is to open a consulate or a representative trade mission of the Iraqi Republic in Kuwait.<sup>113</sup>**

### **Appendix 5.2**

a. Quote from Qassim at press conference on June 25, 1961.

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<sup>112</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 156886: Annex extracts from speeches by Qassim.

<sup>113</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 156886: Annex extracts from speeches by Qassim.

**We are able to get our rights in full, but we always resort to peace, you should do likewise. But I assure you that peace will not do with Imperialism as Imperialism is the enemy of peace...We shall warn this Sheikh not to wrong the people of Kuwait who are actually of the Iraqi people and, if he should violate this he will surely have to face drastic punishment, being treated as one of the rebels.<sup>114</sup>**

b. Quote from Qassim at press conference on June 25, 1961.

**A Presidential decree will shortly be issued appointing the present, honourable Shaikh of Kuwait as the Qaim Naqam (prefect) of the Kuwait district of the Basra (province).**

**He will be a traitor who defies the consensus of the Arab people and the solidarity of his brothers in Iraq.**

**The part of Iraq has now been liberated, but there remains the Kuwaiti people who still suffer under the imperialists, under a clique which juggles with their destiny and fortunes, and a pack of feudalists and Shaikhs which has even denied them water supplies from the land of their brothers in Iraq.<sup>115</sup>**

c. Quote from Qassim at press conference on June 25, 1961.

**The Republic of Iraq has decided to protect the Iraqi people in Kuwait and to demand the land, arbitrarily held by imperialism, which belongs [to Iraq as part] of the province of Basra... We will liberate this section of Iraqi territory ... We are capable of obtaining all our rights. But we always resort to peaceful means ... But I assure you that peaceful methods are useless with imperialism.<sup>116</sup>**

d. Statement made over Baghdad Radio on June 25, 1961.

**[Kuwait is] an indivisible part of Iraq... it is the Iraqi Republic and no one else who signs agreements for Kuwait.<sup>117</sup>**

e. Note on summary of Iraqi decree of June 1961.

**On June 26, the Iraqi Government issued a note to the Diplomatic Corps in Baghdad conveying a memorandum summarizing Iraq's position with regard to the U.K.-Kuwait agreement of June 19, which the Iraqi Government considered to be contrary to its assertion that "Kuwait was and still is an indivisible part of Iraq."<sup>118</sup>**

f. Quote from General Ahmed Saleh al-Abdi (Chief of Staff and Military Governor)

General telegraphed to Qassim the following. Not dated.

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<sup>114</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Baghdad to Foreign Office: Trevelyan, July 4, 1961, No.769 at 2.25 p.m.

<sup>115</sup>Hashim, "The Influence of Iraq", p. 443.

<sup>116</sup>Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq, pp. 105-106.

<sup>117</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963 Volume XVII, Near East, p. 160.

<sup>118</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963 Volume XVII, Near East, p. 160.

**In my own name and in the name of all the members of the Army of July 14, employees, men and officers, I support the statements in your press Conference on June 25 with regard to the conspiracies of Imperialists over Kuwait, the inseparable part of the immortal Iraq Republic. Irrespective of whatever conspiracies it may plot to separate it from our beloved homeland, go ahead, our faithful saviour with God's blessings and your army with which you have destroyed the fortress of Imperialism in the Middle East and achieved the greatest revolution in the 20th Century at your command. May God grant you success.<sup>119</sup>**

g. Iraqi news agency report on July 2.

**The Iraqi Army is a force that has been conceived to expel the Imperialists and the covetous people within the frontiers of Iraq from north of Zakho to the Southernmost part of Kuwait and elsewhere in the great Arab homeland.<sup>120</sup>**

h. Quote from General Qassim on July 14, 1961, at graduation ceremony, Camp Rashid Military academy.

**Kuwait is our land and the land of our forefather. We will fight to regain it. Our army is equipped with modern weapons. We have trained our army to defend our land and help our brethren gain their rights in other lands.<sup>121</sup>**

### Appendix 5.3

Letter from the State Secretary of Kuwait, dated July 2, 1961.

**I am instructed by His Highness the Ruler of Kuwait and in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 35 of the United Nations Charter, I have the honour to request you, in your capacity as President of the Security Council, to call an immediate meeting of the Council to consider urgently the following question: 'Complaint by Kuwait in respect of the situation arising from threats by Iraq to the territorial independence of Kuwait which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security'.<sup>122</sup>**

### Appendix 5.4

Resolution adopted by the Arab League on July 20, 1961 : "Arab Solution."

**1.a) The Government of Kuwait undertakes to request the withdrawal of British forces from Kuwaiti territory as soon as possible.**

**b) The Government of the Republic of Iraq undertakes not to use force in the annexation of Kuwait to Iraq.**

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<sup>119</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Baghdad to Foreign Office: Trevelyan, July 4, 1961, No.769 at 2.25 p.m.

<sup>120</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 156877: Baghdad to Foreign Office: Trevelyan, July 4, 1961, No.769 at 2.25 p.m.

<sup>121</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 156886: Annex extracts from speeches by Qassim

<sup>122</sup> SCOR, 957th Meeting, July 2, 1961.



**c) The Council undertakes to support every wish Kuwait may express for a union or a federation with other countries of the Arab League in accordance with the League's Pact.**

**2. The Council decides:**

**a) To welcome the State of Kuwait as a member of the Arab League. b) To assist the State of Kuwait in joining the United Nations.**

**3. The Arab States undertake to provide effective assistance for the preservation of Kuwait's independence, upon its request, and the Council confers upon the Secretary-General the power to take the necessary measures for the urgent implementation of this resolution.** <sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Finnie, Shifting lines in the Sand, p. 138.

## **Chapter 6: End of an Era**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Chapter 6 is divided into three parts. The first covers the major developments from the end of the crisis in Kuwait in 1961 to the end of 1963. The second examines the policy of the patron through this period, while the third deals with the external policy of the client.

### **6.2 Developments with a bearing on Anglo-Kuwaiti relations**

The Syrian revolution and the claims by Qassim to Kuwait broke the period of relative calm experienced in the Middle East after the Iraqi revolution of July 1958. The fundamental tensions within and between the states of this area had re-surfaced. These included the sub-regional balance of power in the Gulf between Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the historic Baghdad-Cairo rivalry, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the friction between monarchical regimes and Arab nationalism, and the interference of external powers in the area. The change in regime in Iraq in July 1958 had reduced the stability of the Gulf sub-region and increased the interference of external powers in the Middle East region.

The other impact of the revolution in Iraq was the reduced security of Kuwait. Despite the modernisation of the state of Kuwait, the al-Sabah regime continued to depend on the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship for its security. For most of the twentieth century, small weak states in the Middle East such as the Sheikhdoms in the Gulf had sought some form of client-patron relationship with an external power to ensure their survival from the larger regional powers.<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship was a successful example of this as the intervention of British troops in July 1961 clearly demonstrated. Wriggins takes a similar position. He contends that weak powers in this region have been compelled to seek relationships with stronger

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive analysis on small states see: Rothstein, *Alliances*; Keohane, "Lilliputians" and David Vital, *The Inequality of States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

powers. The diplomatic strategies that are employed have as an underlying aim the encouragement of external assistance.<sup>2</sup> He writes that “regional states appeal to outside states and organisations for military, financial, and diplomatic support on the basis of ideology, strategic interests, and patron-client exchanges.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite these possible problems the position of Britain in the Gulf and the Middle East had steadily improved from the dark days of Suez. Its involvement in the eastern Mediterranean had admittedly diminished and the only practical interest in Jordan by the end of 1963 was not in its independence, but rather that it should not be the cause of a new war between Israel and the Arab states. The Arabian peninsula and the Gulf was a different case. Britain still retained extensive interests and influence in this area. The intervention in Kuwait had earned Britain much political capital, while its relations with Saudi Arabia were improving with the resumption of diplomatic relations, despite the continuation of the Buraimi problem. The overthrow of the Qassim regime in Iraq by a revolution in February 1963 had allowed for an improvement in Anglo-Iraqi relations even though the Kuwaiti question had not yet been fully resolved.

The geographical remoteness of Egypt from the region caused Nasser's influence and interest in the upper Gulf to be somewhat limited. The quarrels between Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the war in the Yemen, and the problems with Israel and Syria distracted Nasser further from the position of Britain in the Gulf, while the rivalry and the battle for the leadership of the Arab world between Iraq and Egypt had extended to their attempts to dominate Syria. The British position in the Gulf benefited from this continued Arab conflict. One aspect of this friction between Cairo and Baghdad was that the governments of Iraq and Egypt tacitly preferred the domination of Britain in the Gulf than the region being under the influence of the other.

The Kuwait-Iraq issue had produced strange bedfellows in the Middle East. The UAR was aligned on the issue with Jordan and Saudi Arabia, whose regimes at

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<sup>2</sup> See pp. 119-120 of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Wriggins, *Dynamics*, p. 183.

this time, were being attacked by Cairo Radio and Egyptian newspapers as being enemies of the UAR. The crisis had also made a tacit association between Egypt and 'the arch enemy' Britain. These anomalies were accepted by Nasser as the price of supporting a traditional monarchical rich Gulf oil state that could easily be seen as reactionary against the only other progressive state in the region. The peculiarity of the position of the UAR was underlined by the veto used by the Soviet Union over the application of Kuwait to join the UN.

At the end of 1961 the Foreign Office still believed that Britain could hold on to its position in the Gulf, although not indefinitely. It also thought that nothing should be done to disturb the relationships and agreements with Aden and the Gulf Sheikdoms, and that little was to be gained by dismantling the British position. The fear of Britain's position being replaced by a sweeping Arab nationalist revolution was also diminishing. Arab unity was a myth and was recognised as such by the Foreign Office.<sup>4</sup> The attempts made at federation over the previous five years (between Egypt and Syria and then between Egypt, Syria and Iraq) had not worked. What was also encouraging for the weakened British was the new attitude of the United States.

The war in the Yemen had drawn the Kennedy government further into the labyrinth of Gulf politics. The commercial, financial and strategic importance of Saudi Arabia to the United States, meant that it was continually and increasingly concerned with Saudi security. The United States was also taking on responsibility for maintenance of the status quo in the Arabian peninsula. This was encouraging for the British because their position in the Gulf was inextricably linked with their position in Aden and while they were incapable of dealing with instability on the scale of a potential war between the UAR and Saudi Arabia. The closer alignment of British and American policies in the Middle East had become a key element in the continued safeguarding of the British position. There was however differences in their respective

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<sup>4</sup> Wriggins, *Dynamics*, p. 183.

policies which caused some tension between Washington and London, especially over the Yemen and diplomatic recognition of the rebel regime.

Following the recommendation of the Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir William Luce, to discuss Gulf policy with the Americans, the British Embassy in Washington was instructed to seek the fullest co-operation on matters, other than military aspects, of Gulf policy with the Americans. The British government wanted to leave the military angle to a later date.

It was acknowledged that there was a considerable difference between British and American oil policy in the Gulf. The British were primarily concerned with the contribution of the profits of their two oil companies to the British balance of payments. The policy of the Kennedy government on this issue was influenced by a different set of considerations. For instance although United States oil companies had increased their role and interest in Iraq, United States policy was not constrained by the desire to keep up the supply of oil or to safeguard a high profit yield for the oil companies. The Kennedy government was also less concerned with the balance of payments benefit of American oil companies in their policy decisions because of the much smaller role played by this factor in their very large economy.

Therefore the key difference between the two over their Gulf policies lay in the importance that they placed upon the economic interest. The rest of their policies were quite similar. The Foreign Office assumed that United States policy in the Gulf was based first of all on trying to keep the Soviet Union and Communist influences out of the Gulf and, secondly, on ensuring the "undisturbed access to oil on reasonable terms."<sup>5</sup> An additional objective was the need to maintain peace and stability in the region. The Foreign Office was concerned about how much interest the United States government had in maintaining the favourable terms upon which the oil companies operated. Walmsley wanted to know whether the Americans were concerned mainly with supply of oil, the cost, or the possible impact on their balance of payments. His

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<sup>5</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162783: US policy in the Gulf: Foreign Office to Washington, January 15, 1962: Walmsley to DJ Speares.

concern came from the impact that the terms of the various agreements between the oil companies and the Gulf States had on British policy, as it was part of the justification for Britain remaining in the area. The American attitude on this policy was therefore of significant interest to the British.

The British Embassy in Washington agreed with the thrust of Walmsley's appreciation of United States policy in the Gulf. Greenhill highlighted the main differences in policy as the distinction the Kennedy government made between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Sheikhdoms. The majority of American oil interests in the region were located in Saudi Arabia through ARAMCO. This, combined with the virulent anti-Communist stance of the Saudi government, made the Americans view Saudi Arabia as "one of their countries."<sup>6</sup>In contrast they viewed Kuwait and the other Gulf Sheikhdoms as a British area of responsibility. They were prepared to back up and support the British government in its lead in the area as long as this did not embarrass them elsewhere. This had been clearly shown in the Kennedy administration's willingness to send Naval and Marine forces (Solent Amity) sailing off Africa and Mombassa to the Gulf to support the British action at the time of the Kuwaiti crisis.<sup>7</sup> The United States government had also readily supported the British and the Kuwaitis in the United Nations debates. Over the Omani question, United States interests would have been best served by backing Saudi Arabia and the Arab nationalists. Yet the United States deferred to the British view point. This was primarily due to its decision to continue viewing this region as a 'British sphere of influence', and also to the active diplomatic pressure of the British government.

During the 1950s superpower competition shifted from Europe to the Third world, particularly the Middle East. In the early 1960s the bipolar rivalry extended further in the Middle East into the sub-region of the Gulf. The political power of the two superpowers over the actors in the Gulf, like the influence of Britain, proved to be somewhat limited.

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<sup>6</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162783: Washington to Foreign Office, January 23, 1962: Greenhill to Walmsley.

<sup>7</sup> See pp. 203-204 of this thesis.

**Superpower involvement increased the military capabilities of the regional states but did not cause the conflicts. Even though each of these patron-client relationships has been highly asymmetrical, the external power has shown only a limited ability to affect either domestic reforms or the direction of foreign policies if the local regime opposed them.<sup>8</sup>**

A power vacuum was developing because of the reduction of British authority and influence in this area. Attempts were being made by the superpowers to fill this vacuum. The war in the Yemen had allowed the Soviet Union to project its power and had caused the United States to increase its commitment to Saudi Arabia and the stability of the Gulf. The interests of the superpowers were beginning to cover the entire Middle East region.

The other structural tension in the Middle East was the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria appeared a prime target for Communist penetration in the wake of the revolution, but the split in the UAR had broken the strategic stranglehold that Israel had faced and therefore reduced the likelihood, in the short term, of another Arab-Israeli war. Unfortunately, tensions continued to build-up, with Israel successfully launching a meteorological rocket propelled by solid fuel on July 5, 1961. This missile, with its obvious military potential, concerned the Arabs, as did the concurrent Israeli nuclear program. Israel was also an issue on which the Arabs could present a sort of united front. The Arab states spoke with one voice over the plans of Israel to divert the Jordan waters and on the Arab refugees of Palestine, with the Arab League stating that a diversion of the Jordan waters by Israel would be a justification for war. In reality, even on the issue of Israel, the Arab League was still unable to agree on united action. Egypt had made strong efforts to build up a Palestinian military and political entity, but this has been strenuously blocked by Jordan for its own security reasons.

Britain was anxious that the Arab-Israeli conflict should remain that of cold hostility rather than hot war. For this reason it was concerned that Western states should refrain from policies that either promoted an arms race or changed the military balance of power significantly. Its reason for this position was that any escalation in the

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<sup>8</sup> Wriggins, *Dynamics*, p. 197.

Arab-Israeli conflict exposed it to criticism and possibly sanctions from both sides, and also because of financial and diplomatic reasons it could not readily take sides. The issue was also damaging to Britain's position in the Gulf where criticism often came from the Sheikhs as well as their domestic populations.

In the wake of the 1961 crisis, Kuwait was faced with a number of problems both internal and external. Domestically, the al-Sabah regime faced problems from the change in society and the economy brought on by the oil revolution. Pressures emanated from a massive rise in the expatriate population and from the developing middle classes in Kuwait.<sup>9</sup> To deal with these problems Sheikh Abdullah set up a Constituent Assembly to widen the level of political participation. This Assembly delivered a draft constitution which was subsequently promulgated by Sheikh Abdullah in November 1962. The long term policy for dealing with the social tensions within Kuwait was to buy off the most influential families and the Middle Class. This was successfully achieved by the Land Purchase scheme.<sup>10</sup> This program was designed by the Kuwaiti government to support, preserve and augment the wealth of the merchant class. In the 1950s and 1960s land was purchased by the government at high prices. A fraction of this land was maintained while the rest was sold at low prices back to the merchants at low prices. This constituted a transfer of revenues from the state to the merchants. Individual merchants were also financially helped by the state through preferential monopolies, dealerships, and even personal loans.

During August 1962 discussion over the possible heir to Sheikh Abdullah took place within Kuwait. The legal footing of the succession was needed for the drafting of the constitution. Argument raged over who had the right to choose the successor and a law was drafted in the constitution setting out the basis of the succession. In 1962 Sheikh Abdullah finally named his brother Sheikh Sabah Salim, who was deputy prime minister and foreign minister, as his successor.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kamal Osman Salih, "Kuwait: Political Consequences of Modernization", Middle East Studies 1 (1991), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Crystal, Kuwait, pp. 61-62.

<sup>11</sup> Crystal, Kuwait, p. 26.



In the Arab diplomatic arena there was a reduction in the support for the Kuwaiti cause given by the UAR in the beginning of 1962. This was partially because of Nasser's decision to withdraw Egypt from the active leadership of the Arab League, proclaiming that Egypt would not attend any further sessions or participate in any of its actions. The delayed establishment of a UAR embassy in Kuwait and the withdrawal of the UAR contingent of the Arab League force in Kuwait were two indications of this. Despite this frosting of relations, the British understood correctly that the UAR would not support or even agree to the claims of Iraq to Kuwait. Nasser's motives were governed more by his attitude over Syria. The riches of Kuwait, if gained by Iraq, would have placed Qassim in a commanding position in the Gulf and the Fertile Crescent. Such a development would have been inimical to the interests of the UAR.

The external problems of the al-Sabah regime stemmed mainly from the dangerous security environment bequeathed by Qassim's threats. One way to deal with this problem was to seek as much international recognition as possible. The security framework with the British still remained in place and the political framework of the Arab League was important. Membership of the United Nations was the primary short-term aim of the al-Sabah regime while a resolution of the Iraqi threat was its long-term aim. The two issues were actually interlinked and the breakthrough came with the fall of the Qassim regime in a revolution on February 8, 1963. This change had important implications for the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship and for the respective Gulf foreign policies of the two states. First, the new regime was quickly given formal recognition by Kuwait on February 9, by Sheikh Abdullah who was attempting to exploit the change in circumstances to make a breakthrough in relations with Iraq. Second, goodwill and confidence building measures were advanced between the two states with the opening on February 18 of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border and the resumption of telecommunications and the postal service. Third, tensions between Iraq and Kuwait were reduced further by the withdrawal of the Sudanese contingent of the Arab League Security Force on February 20.

The successful application of Kuwait to the United Nations also came with the fall of the Qassim regime in Iraq. The Soviet Union now had little to gain by blocking Kuwait's application to the United Nation, and on March 12 it extended de jure recognition to Kuwait. On May 7 the Security Council duly recommended Kuwait's application for United Nation's membership. Four days later the Kuwaiti delegation led by Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad left for the United Nations and on May 14 the General Assembly approved the application.

On October 4, 1963 a deal was struck between Kuwait and Iraq over the recognition issue. Sheikh Abdullah had managed to achieve his policy objectives of securing Iraq, but not at the cost of the British connection, even though the new Iraqi government had placed pressure on the Kuwaiti government to dismantle its agreements with Britain as a quid pro quo for its recognition. With the events of July 1961 still fresh in the memory, the al-Sabah regime refused. The eventual settlement reached was more of a financial transaction than a diplomatic resolution. As Jackson, the British Ambassador to Kuwait, wrote in his annual report:

**Kuwait purchased and Iraq cynically sold recognition, however, a draft of £30 million on the State reserves was necessary and had to be approved by a special session of the National Assembly. On 4th October an agreed minute was signed in Baghdad providing for Iraqi recognition of Kuwait and the extension by Kuwait to Iraq of an interest free loan of [Kuwaiti Dinars] KD 30 million repayable within 25 years.<sup>12</sup>**

This security for cash was the beginning of the rentier politics of the Kuwaiti regime. Its oil dollar diplomacy for the next few years was a corollary to and not a replacement of the Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. 'Oil dollar diplomacy' was extended by Kuwait to other Arab States. A loan was given to Algeria of £10 million. Egypt received a £3 million loan as well as temporary financial assistance worth around £12 million.

The financial cost of this diplomacy was high even for oil rich Kuwait. Only £5 million could be distributed by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development that

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<sup>12</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 174882: Kuwait: Annual Review for 1963, January 2, 1964: Jackson.

was, in contrast to the 'oil dollar diplomacy', based on an economic rather than a political basis.

The client-patron relationship was moving towards its inevitable demise. Oil money seemed to be fixing the diplomatic and security problems of Kuwait. The result of this was a move of the client towards a **Regulation** objective.<sup>13</sup> As indicated by the patron-client model, shown in Tables 1.2 and 1.3, any reduction in the threat environment and or increasing financial status of the client leads to a lessening of ties in the clientelistic relationship depending on the level of interaction between client and patron. There was a distancing of public relations made by the al-Sabah from Britain. In private, relations between the two States continued to be close. For example, the British Ambassador was kept fully informed by Sheikh Abdullah of the negotiations with Iraq. Sheikh Abdullah regularly mentioned his belief in the old maxim of relying on 'God and the British'. Conversely, in public the Kuwaiti government promised support for the Omani rebels, and censured British policy in South Arabia.

Trouble in Radfan prompted a more interventionist approach by the United States in the Gulf. It was clear that the economic and strategic importance of Saudi Arabia to the United States played a large part in American Gulf policy. The Kennedy government informed both the UAR and the Yemeni Republicans that they regarded "Aden as a joint Anglo-US interest, owing to its importance for the Gulf."<sup>14</sup>

The Aden base remained vitally important to the British position in the Gulf. Yet more important than Aden for the West was the continued independence of Saudi Arabia. The British government mistakenly still viewed Saudi Arabia as a potential threat to the Gulf Sheikhdoms partly because the Buraimi Oasis troubles. Buraimi was the key to inner Oman and to the neighbouring Sheikhdoms along the Gulf coast. Measuring six miles across and circular in shape, the oasis was made up of a dozen settlements and a plentiful supply of water. The area was fertile and supported a variety of crops and livestock. To the north and west of Buraimi were the tracks

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<sup>13</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.

<sup>14</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 174882: Kuwait: Annual Review for 1963, January 2, 1964: Jackson.

leading to Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi. To the south were the routes to Nizwa, Bahlah, Izhi and the other ancient towns of central Oman. To the east a pass led through the Hajar mountains to Sauhar on the Gulf of Oman. The control of Buraimi was therefore of vital importance, because through it these Sheikhdoms and inner Oman could be controlled. Added to the strategic importance of the area was the expectation that oil might be located there. All these factors fed into the long dispute between Britain and Saudi Arabia over the area.

The main danger for the West came from the Yemeni republicans, who were supported substantially by the UAR. Nasser could not be too readily alienated by the West because of the importance of his position in the Arab League and the support that he extended to Kuwait. At the time, the Kennedy government was pursuing a new policy of financial largesse towards Nasser in the hope of influencing his behaviour. So they, like the British, were therefore less than keen to abandon this new policy to mount an all out attack on Nasser. The position they adopted was to recognise the new Yemeni Republic, but at the same time announce both privately and publicly that any move to undermine the Saudi regime would be met with a swift military response.

The conflict in the Yemen had serious security implications for the West with a potential threat to the stability and integrity of Saudi Arabia, and the danger that it would expose the British position in Aden, which up to then had been an integral part of the British military and political set up for the whole sub-region of the Gulf. The conflict was a major disruption to stability in the Gulf and, as the West feared, to the security of the oil supplies. Egyptian forces were engaging Saudi Arabian forces in the Yemen-Saudi border region.

The British government unlike their American counterparts, did not extend recognition to Yemen. The danger to the British position was that rather than limiting the threat to Aden this stance had only heightened the dangers. During this time the UAR had again bombed Saudi bases just over the border from Yemen. Fortunately, the overthrow of Qassim in Iraq and the possibility of a revolution in Syria was a timely

distraction for Faysal and Nasser from the Yemen conflict and allowed for a reduction in tensions.

The United States was clearly now taking over the role of Britain as the main stabilising influence in South Arabia. The aims of the Kennedy government were to stop Yemen being used as a base for hostile action against Saudi Arabia. This required the removal of Egyptian forces from the area, but also that the Yemenis be allowed to make their own decisions about their future.<sup>15</sup> The Kennedy government was also determined to stop the conflict. Kennedy instructed Ellsworth Bunker, United States Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, to inform Faysal that United States military support would be conditional on Saudi Arabia suspending support for the royalist forces of Yemen.<sup>16</sup> Although Ambassador Bunker was successful in implementing a limited disengagement in March-April 1963, hostilities continued until 1967. The United States government was attempting to fulfill three important western objectives. First, it aimed to prevent a direct UAR-Saudi Arabia confrontation. Second, it sought to secure and preserve the regime of Faysal. Third, it aimed to protect vital Western interests in the Arabian Peninsula.

### **6.3 Policy of the patron: Britain.**

British policy in the Middle East since 1958 had been shaped by a number of broad assumptions. These assumptions were based upon and influenced by core fundamental interests that had not changed for many years. Sir Roger Stevens outlined these interests as:

**[That of preserving] i. as far as possible the flow of oil and the financial benefits resulting from the present pattern of its flow; ii. to minimise Russian and communist influence in the area; iii. to have stability or, if there must be a change, a peaceful change; iv. to build up such good will as we have, and if possible to create more of it, towards the West in general and towards the UK and UK policies world-wide in particular; v. to expand our trading position and**

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<sup>15</sup> JFKL: NSC Countries Series: Box No. 123b: Letter from JFK to Prince Faysal of Saudi Arabia, March 1, 1963.

<sup>16</sup> JFKL: NSC Countries Series: Box No. 123b: Memorandum for Mr McGeorge Bundy, The White House, February 28, 1963.

**to assist in so far as we can in promoting the economic stability of the area; vi. to maintain defence facilities in so far as they are necessary to meet aims i. and ii. above and to preserve such overflying and staging rights as may be necessary for our defence responsibilities in the Middle East, Africa and the Far East.<sup>17</sup>**

British policy was to be tested and judged by whether it fulfilled these objectives. Stevens was aware of some of the incompatibilities of these aims in certain circumstances. The military protection of the oil supply by British forces in the Gulf did not engender good will amongst certain States in the region. However, with some of these states it was altogether unlikely that any goodwill would be achieved even if all British forces were removed from the area.

The cost of these military commitments brought in the usual Treasury pressures to seek cheaper solutions. Exploration was made to obtaining the same level of security for oil and finance by political as opposed to military means. British military forces in Aden, Bahrain and the Trucial States and the military commitment to Kuwait were still present as a direct result of the oil interest. It was now being argued that the flow of oil could never be completely guaranteed by military forces. Although Kuwait was the largest supplier of oil to Britain the oil companies had access to other important sources of oil. Stevens ventured that "the peculiar importance attached to Kuwait derives more particularly from its investment habits than from a purely supply point of view."<sup>18</sup>

It was acknowledged that the military commitment to Kuwait could, because of the political cost, become prohibitive and undermine the overall objectives of British policy. The British government still sought to contain and minimise the Communist and Soviet penetration in the Middle East. This is evidence against the argument that patrons which decline in power seek purely economic goals over a mixture of economic and strategic goals. Yet these strategic goals could be viewed as being purely a way of defending the vital economic goals.

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<sup>17</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 163972: British interests aims and policies in the Middle East, March 26, 1962: Stevens.

<sup>18</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 163972: British interests aims and policies in the Middle East, March 26, 1962: Stevens.

The other problem of British troops in the Gulf was that it gave the Soviet Union a tool of propaganda with which it could attempt to undermine and subvert stability in the Gulf. The key Western military and political grouping capable of blocking the Soviet advance into the Middle East was CENTO. The argument that in the event of a major East-West military confrontation British forces in the Gulf could act to stop the Soviet Union was suspect for two reasons. First, Soviet forces were thousands of miles from the Gulf region. Any movement of these troops towards the Gulf would be a long and slow process, fraught with logistical problems. Such a move would trigger Western action in this area based around the use of Nuclear weapons and the response of CENTO forces. Second, the British forces in the area were not of a sufficient capacity to deal with a Soviet invasion, but were rather there to act as a policing force and to keep the waters of the Gulf relatively secure. The forces in the area could, however, have enabled a larger build-up of troops into the region because of their control over numerous base facilities.

The problem for CENTO (formerly the Baghdad Pact) was that the political cost for any of the Arab countries to join this alliance was too great. The Hashemite regime in Iraq had been swept from power in 1958 partly because of its Western links through membership of the Baghdad Pact. The resultant lack of Arab members of CENTO meant that the security provided was more that of a trip wire, with little force in depth, than a comprehensive security unit like NATO.

Iran was a key Middle Eastern country in 1962 in the CENTO alliance, capable of dealing to some extent with the Soviet threat. As part of maintaining its Gulf policy the British government recognised the importance of its CENTO links and Iran's role in it. Iranian stability and its continued economic development was crucial to the success of CENTO and therefore partly to the fulfilment of Britain's six core objectives set out by Stevens for the Middle East.

The threat of Communism spreading amongst the domestic populations in the region was a concern. Despite these concerns events between 1958 and 1962 in Iraq had shown that whatever the advantages there were to the Communist cause, little of

significance was achieved by these groups. Islam and the cultural traditions of the region played an important role in the failings of this atheist ideology. Soviet advances as opposed to Communist penetration was another matter entirely. Soviet largesse combined with reaction to certain Western policies had pushed some of the States in the region into closer relationships with Moscow. Afghanistan and Iraq were two examples of this and so the Foreign Office was sensitive to pursuing policies that did not alienate certain Middle East States from the West towards the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> This policy position was not always attainable when it conflicted with Britain's pressure against Arab nationalism.

This reason was one of the main justifications behind the British policy of non-involvement in Middle Eastern interstate disputes. The period following the revolution in Iraq in 1958 had seen a series of inter-Arab quarrels all of which had added to instability in the region. The challenge to the West was as much about playing a non-partisan role as about adapting to the forever changing circumstances of Middle East politics. The West also needed to present a co-ordinated approach to the Middle East. Unfortunately, this did not always prevail over individual states' economic and political objectives.

The British view was that political stability along with the continued close relationship between the Sheikhs and Britain would be the best way of guaranteeing that the political alignment of the Gulf states was not changed by Communist subversion. The Communist threat, they rightly believed, came from outside the region and not from within it, but concern was expressed over the dangers, indigenous support for Communism, that could arise from the inequalities brought on by the oil wealth. It was believed that political discontent from either lack of representation or from the large monetary differentials, caused by oil, could lead to the growth of Arab nationalist movements. These groups would direct their criticism towards the British and the Sheikhs, but more dangerously would be open to the control or influence of

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<sup>19</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 163972: British interests aims and policies in the Middle East, March 26, 1962: Stevens.



the Communists. British policy was directed at avoiding both these eventualities. Encouragement was made to the Sheikhs to invest large proportions of their oil royalties on improving welfare and infrastructure in the hope of placating these social forces.

Continued British influence in the Gulf derived from a sustained ability to act as security guarantor to the Sheikhdoms. A spin off from this was a measure of authority over oil affairs, which was also due to the perceived and real independence of the British oil companies. The close relationship required between the oil companies and the Gulf Sheikhdoms was an important element in the dynamics of the British position. The British government was careful not to upset this close relationship and went to some lengths to foster it.

The stability of the Gulf was vital for the uninterrupted flow of oil and the continued security of the Gulf Sheikhdoms. Pressures within the area that worked against such stability remained. Kuwait was still the glittering prize for Iraq, both economically, politically and strategically. The British government also believed that Saudi Arabia still harboured designs upon Bahrain, Qatar and, more clearly, Burarmi. Iran still laid claims to Bahrain. British forces in the Gulf had always kept the lid on these pressures acting as the stabiliser in the balance of power system in the Gulf, between Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Sheikhdoms.

Conversely, a suggestion was made in the Foreign Office that, far from being the bedrock of stability in the region, British forces aroused counter-pressures and had become a major cause of instability. The idea was put forward that perhaps a period of temporary instability (caused by British troop withdrawal) followed by a new settled equilibrium would be more in British and Western interests than the continued presence of its forces. However there could be no guarantee of what this new stability would be as alternative guarantors of the Sheikhdoms security could not be

found.<sup>20</sup>The UN presence or some form of joint superpower guarantee was considered. The view was that this could not be achieved and would be ineffective if it was.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the pressures on the British to withdraw from the Gulf they still managed to maintain their position. Two worse-case scenarios which would have led to a total undermining of the British position were avoided. First was the possibility of a radical revolution in Saudi Arabia and, second, an alliance between Qassim and Nasser. The traditional rivalry between Baghdad and Cairo had always worked to the favour of Britain. An alliance between Iraq and Egypt could see the carving up of the region between these two powers, while a revolution in Saudi Arabia would have destabilised the whole region.

Although the British government professed a policy of non-involvement in inter-Arab affairs this was not the case in the Gulf. They still had direct military, economic and political interests in the Gulf region, the most important of which was the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. The military intervention of July 1961 changed the political picture in Kuwait and the Gulf. British policy was reviewed and reassessed in the months after Operation Vantage. From September 1961 to May 1962 the various British government departments interested in the relationship with Kuwait met together and worked out a framework for British policy into the late 1960s. Arguments concentrated on whether, and for how long, Britain could maintain its military obligations to Kuwait and its other Gulf protectorate states. Concern was expressed over the motives for British support for Kuwait by the Ministry of Power and the Treasury. The old assumptions were beginning to be questioned as the Treasury extended its financial influence to this aspect of British policy. Were British forces in the Gulf the only way of guaranteeing the integrity of Kuwait and therefore the free flow of oil at reasonable prices to Britain? Did the independence of Kuwait matter in regard to the oil question? Was it not the case that whoever controlled the state would still want to sell the oil? Was the development of OPEC and a Kuwaiti

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<sup>20</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162783: Discussion with the State Department on British Policy Draft.

<sup>21</sup> See p. 183 of this thesis.

owned oil company reasons to question the assumption of oil at 'reasonable prices'? Officials at the Treasury were also worried about the cost of relocating the infantry battalions from Kenya to Bahrain, which was essential to the continued ability of Britain to keep to clause 'D' of the Exchange of Letters (June 19, 1961) with Kuwait.<sup>22</sup>

The forces from Kenya had played a key part in Operation Vantage and would form the backbone of any future planned intervention in Kuwait. The forthcoming independence of Kenya and the loss of the British base there compelled the relocation of British forces.<sup>23</sup> The proposed move of these forces to Bahrain would need an initial capital outlay of around five million pounds. The Foreign Office argued that this expenditure could clearly be justified by the large foreign exchange benefits made on the sterling deposits of Sheikh Abdullah and the earnings from British exports in the region, which were guaranteed by British security in the Gulf.

The revolt in Yemen in September 1962 threw the Gulf region into further turmoil. The revolution clearly was going to have an effect upon the Gulf states and future British policy in the region. Whitehall had been on the verge of formulating a Gulf policy for the 1960s, but the revolt had put this on hold. Two important considerations, one financial, the other military, had now to be taken into account. First, was whether the strengthening of the Aden base proposed by the Governor of Aden could or should be attempted. The proposals were costly and far reaching in scale, but the Aden base was the vital component of the security and political policies of Britain in the Gulf. Second, whether the British military commitments in the Gulf could be met if the Aden base was lost. In a report assessing the impact of the Yemen revolution Walmsley wrote that "the Joint Planning Staff, following a directive by the Prime Minister, [had] begun considering how we could defend Kuwait if we lost the use of Aden after 1967."<sup>24</sup> The Colonial Office had made an assessment of the base in

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<sup>22</sup> See p. 164 of this thesis.

<sup>23</sup> See p. 213 of this thesis.

<sup>24</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 168632: Report; effects of the Yemen Revolution on the Persian Gulf States and future policy in the Arabian Peninsula, December 1962: Walmsley.

Aden and had concluded that the base would be impossible to hold after 1970 and that graceful withdrawal before this date might be preferred.

British policy underwent another fundamental review in the spring of 1963. The geopolitical picture had changed again with the overthrow of the Qassim regime in Iraq and the war in the Yemen. Objectives, policy and problems were again analysed by the Foreign Office. A number of questions were posed. First, what were they trying to achieve in the region and what were the fundamental objectives of policy? Second, taking into account the assessment of the future position in Aden, would their aims still be tenable in 1970 or would these objectives have changed? Third, how would they achieve these objectives, and would a military presence still be needed to ensure the aims as they had in the past? Fourth, if the military option was no longer available, what other means of achieving the aims could be used and what changes to their position would be needed to use these other means? Fifth, what was the cost factor of each course of action and what place would expenditure have in determining the policy direction? Sixth, what role would the Anglo-American alliance play in this process?<sup>25</sup>

The policy objectives were still dominated by the need to protect the free flow of Middle East oil on reasonable terms. Middle East oil was still of vital importance to the British and West European economies. In 1962 the Middle East had produced 306 million tons of oil. Out of that, 150 million tons of crude oil had been consumed by western Europe, including forty million tons by Britain. The value of the oil imported into Britain had been approximately £350 million. The foreign exchange net expenditure cost, because of the British oil companies, had only been in the region of £150 million. The oil companies, Shell and British Petroleum (BP), were vital to the health of the British economy with the balance of payments being heavily dependent on their profits. The production profits of the companies amounted to around £200 million annually.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 170165, "Lord Hood to Sir R Stevens," March 6, 1963.

<sup>26</sup>PRO: FO 371/ 170165: Report on Middle East oil, March 11, 1963.

The investment of the oil companies in the region was very high. It was estimated that BP and Shell had spent £350 million, between 1952-1962, on production and exploration in the Middle East. Their fixed asset investments amounted to around the same figure. The cost to the British economy of Shell and BP being excluded from the region would have been immense, and the resultant loss in investments and assets as well as the cost to the balance of payments caused by exclusion would have been severely damaging to Britain. Added to this, the increase in costs of transportation, refining and distribution on a world-wide scale would have been a huge blow to Britain.

It was believed that threats to the British oil production could come from three sources: first, Soviet penetration of the region by force or by subversion, second, by domination of the area by a single power such as Iraq or Egypt, or third, by local disturbances or revolution, such as the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq. This could lead to oil being sold at unacceptable prices or complete stoppage of oil supplies. The policy aims, remained therefore, to deal with these three potential threats in order to secure the free flow of oil on reasonable terms.

The independence of Kuwait also remained a key objective of British policy in the Gulf. In 1962, it was the largest oil producing state in the world, with production running at around ninety million tons (Saudi Arabia was producing seventy-four million tons, Iraq forty-eight million tons and Iran sixty-three million tons of crude oil). Kuwait also possessed huge reserves of oil, estimated to be twenty percent of the worlds known oil reserves at the time.

Kuwait's independence had been an important objective of British policy. This had been demonstrated in the Anglo-Kuwaiti exchange of letters and the intervention of British forces into Kuwait in July 1961. The military plans and strategic dispositions of British forces in the Gulf were largely drawn up to deal with Kuwait's security and the military arrangements were bound up in the patron-client relationship between Britain and Kuwait. Problematically, but probably correctly, Sheikh Abdullah had

agreed only to the pre-positioning of a military stockpile inside Kuwait and not the permanent stationing of troops.

The British position was changing in the world and in the Gulf region. The decline in its strength and power was affecting the scope and breadth of its policy. The Treasury, always keen to make cuts in expenditure, questioned the fundamental beliefs upon which British policy in the Gulf had so far rested. It argued that military security could be replaced with political alliances, and they also rightly pointed out that British forces in the Gulf were not there primarily to contain the Soviet Union or stop it advancing into the region. CENTO was the military organisation that contained the Soviet bloc in South West Asia. CENTO was made up of Britain, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. As with the Baghdad Pact the United States had only indirect association. The money spent on CENTO, by Britain, was considerably smaller than the amount spent on direct defence of the Gulf. The Treasury went on to argue that if the Soviet Union attacked the Gulf region then the West would respond with a general world war. Defence arrangements need not therefore be made, for this contingency, with forces in the Gulf. It also argued that British oil interests would not be effected by the ownership of oil since whoever controlled the oil in the region they would still be dependent on the West to purchase it. The Treasury was arguing that the interdependence of the Middle East economies with the west and the selling of oil was so important to the economies that the sale of oil would always be guaranteed.<sup>27</sup>

A contrary argument was put forward by Sir William Luce in 1967. He wrote that:

**No one would deny the importance of the oil interest, but it is frequently argued that there is no need for any special political or military effort on our part to "protect" it and that it should look after itself like any other commercial enterprise; rather than maintain our position in the Gulf, which may itself bring dangers for us and our friends in the area, it would be better to withdraw quickly and allow the normal economic laws of supply and demand to ensure the flow of oil. These arguments over-simplify the problem. It is certainly true that British troops neither can nor should protect the oil industry in any direct sense. The oil companies must handle their own relations with the host governments in**

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<sup>27</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 170165: Treasury memorandum to Foreign Office, March, 1963.

**all matters which affect the terms on which they operate, and it is not necessary or desirable that they should receive support from the British Government beyond the bounds of normal diplomatic practice. Even in the extreme case of nationalisation of British oil interests, should this ever arise, there should be no question of forcible intervention. But the oil industry does require a reasonable degree of peace and stability in the areas in which it operates if it is to thrive and expand in the future, to the benefit of both the producing and consuming countries; and this basic requirement is not within the scope of the oil companies.<sup>28</sup>**

These arguments did not stop the eventual British withdrawal from the Gulf announced in 1968 and executed in 1971. Yet the sentiments of this argument helped keep Britain in the Gulf throughout the 1960s.

Up to this point Britain had achieved its objectives by having military bases and forces in the Gulf. The Soviet threat and the security of oil production and transportation had been met by British force in the Gulf. With the fall of Qassim in Iraq, the question was whether Kuwaiti security and independence could be achieved by other means. The call was for a political rather than a military solution to Kuwait's security problem. During his tenure as the Political Resident in the Gulf, Luce suggested that this still had little bearing on the position of British forces. Iraqi recognition of Kuwait in 1963 did not change the need to maintain British forces to defend Kuwait. The main task of these forces remained the protection of British assets and investments in the region. The assets were Britain's oil companies and the access to oil on reasonable terms that they enjoyed.

#### **6.4 Policy of the client: Kuwait**

Concern over the vulnerability of Kuwait in the wake of the 1961 crisis led Sheikh Abdullah to adopt a new diplomatic strategy. He communicated to the acting

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<sup>28</sup> Luce, "Britain in the Persian Gulf", p. 280.

Political Agent, Alan Rothnie, his decision to exchange certain Ambassadors with various countries and to dispatch a number of goodwill missions to various states in the world.<sup>29</sup> Kuwait would exchange ambassadors with Saudi Arabia, the UAR, the Lebanon, the United States and Britain. There were two reasons for this increase in diplomatic representation. The first was to build up the political security of Kuwait by gaining international diplomatic support and recognition. This policy mirrors that suggested for weak powers by Robert Keohane.<sup>30</sup> The second was to expound the viewpoint of Kuwait to the international community in order to contend with the propaganda war being waged by Baghdad against Kuwait. The increase in diplomatic representation in Kuwait was to lead to a decrease in the influence of Britain, because the foreign information, advice and pressure exerted on Sheikh Abdullah would no longer be dominated by Britain. This was recognised and accepted by the British government. This new proactive diplomacy of Sheikh Abdullah included the sending of diplomatic envoys to various parts of the world to promote the independence of Kuwait and gain support for the entry of Kuwait into the United Nations. These goodwill missions were organised to cover Asia, Africa, the Western Hemisphere, Western Europe and if possible the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup>

The events of June and July 1961 had indicated to the government of Kuwait the international environment that they now faced. The changed relationship between Kuwait and Britain, made by the Exchange of Letters in June 1961, meant that Kuwait could no longer be sheltered by the British from the wider world. Although the patron-client relationship remained in place, Anglo-Kuwaiti relations were becoming more diffuse and divergent over certain issues. As members of the Arab League the Kuwaiti government were now following the Arab line on many issues. Characteristically for one of the conservative Sheikhly regimes, when inter-Arab questions arose that split the Arab world, the Kuwaiti government attempted to steer a neutral course. For

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<sup>29</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156828: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 22, 1961, 1.00p.m.: Rothnie.

<sup>30</sup> Keohane, "Lilliputians", p. 295; See pp. 132-142 of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 156828: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 22, 1961, 1.00p.m.: Rothnie.



instance, over the events in Algeria, Sheikh Abdullah, although distressed by the news, was determined to adopt a neutral position and not be drawn into a 'Kings Club'. In a damage limitation exercise Sheikh Abdullah wrote a brotherly letter to King Saud reiterating the long historical ties between their two families and the two states. Yet he gave no indication to Saud to suggest that Kuwait would take sides with Saudi Arabia against Nasser over the issue.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of 1961 Sheikh Sabah, the Foreign Minister of Kuwait, announced at a press conference that Kuwait was to adopt a policy of non-alignment. The Minister also proclaimed that his government had decided to set up a Kuwaiti Development Fund for the economic development of Arab countries. Over the issue of the seizure of Kuwaiti ships and assets by Iraq, the Minister called for moves to be made by the Arab League.<sup>33</sup>

In February 1962 rumours swept Baghdad that Syria had put forward a number of proposals to settle the Iraq-Kuwait dispute. These, it was alleged, included:

**That Kuwait, while maintaining a kind of independence, should become a form of Arab Federal Territory; that it should be the seat of the Arab League Secretariat and that it should become a Development Bank for the Arab World. A fourth proposal, of which we have had only one report, was that the Ruler of Kuwait should drop the title of Emir and revert to that of Sheikh.**<sup>34</sup>

This Syrian move was viewed with disdain by the Kuwaitis and the suggestions were clearly rejected by them as they continued to pursue membership of the UN.

The Kuwaiti government attempted to persuade the Soviet government through a number of channels to waive its veto in the Security Council, with Soviet representation in Kuwait offered as the incentive. The Foreign Office advised Sheikh Abdullah not to barter with the Soviet Union on this issue because of its usual tactic of continually raising the bargaining price. The problem facing the Kuwaiti government

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<sup>32</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162893: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 27, 1962: Richmond to Walmsley.

<sup>33</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162887: Kuwait-UAR relations: Cairo to Foreign Office, December 28, 1961.

<sup>34</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162898: Baghdad to Foreign Office, February 21, 1962: Robey to Figg.

was when to put in another membership application to the UN. The danger was that the issue could turn into another Cold War issue with little prospect of resolution

On June 8, 1962, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, made a comprehensive statement of Kuwaiti foreign policy in the Kuwaiti National Assembly. This policy statement focused on Arab affairs. Whether the motivation for Kuwait's position on Arab unity was based on the usual Arab platitudes or from an actual commitment to the process, the Foreign Minister was clear in his government's support for the concept. The pan-Arabist position of the Kuwaiti government was manifested by five general aims and two specific policies.<sup>35</sup>

The general aims were first, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other Arab states and neutrality over disputes between and of the Arab states, and second, commitment to and belief in the Arab League as a vehicle for the development of a common united Arab family. Third came the support and backing for the complete liberation of the Arab homeland, fourth, the use of economic resources to strengthen the Arab states, in particular the Gulf states, Yemen and Algeria, and fifth, the strengthening of Arab diplomatic relations.<sup>36</sup>

The two specific policies related to Palestine and the Oman. On Palestine, the Foreign Minister committed Kuwait to the Arab League resolutions on the 'usurped homeland', to give full assistance to the refugees through UNRWA, and to support the enforcement of the boycott of Israel. Over Oman, the Foreign Minister signalled the departure from supporting Britain by backing the Arab League position.

The other important element in the Foreign Minister's statement was the commitment of Kuwait to a position of non-alignment in the Cold War and the wish expressed on behalf of the Kuwaiti government to co-operate fully with the non-aligned states of Africa and Asia. From this position the Kuwaiti government was able to engage in widespread lobbying of the non-aligned group of states in the hope of persuading the Soviet Union that it had nothing to gain from vetoing an application

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<sup>35</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162812: Kuwait to Foreign Office, January 12, 1963: Errock to Smellgrove.

<sup>36</sup> Jill Crystal gives a good analysis of Kuwait's Foreign Policy in: Crystal, Kuwait, Ch. 6.

supported by "most of the Arab States the principal 'anti-colonialist' delegations and some Africans, such as Somalia, Congo (Leopoldville) and Tanganyika."<sup>37</sup> Plans were set to apply for admission to the UN on September 15, 1962 with the UAR agreeing to act on behalf of Kuwait.<sup>38</sup>

Predictably, the British government was advised by its Embassy in Moscow that the Soviet Union was unlikely to remove the veto. The Embassy suggested that the Soviet Union was supporting Iraq on this issue as a quid pro quo for the support of Iraq over its Berlin policy. The UAR Ambassador to Moscow agreed with this assessment.<sup>39</sup>

The UAR refused to sponsor the Kuwaiti cause unless there was some clear indication that the Soviet Union was about to lift its veto.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, on September 28 the Soviet Foreign Minister, Gromyko, expressed to the United States Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, that the Soviet Union was "reviewing the question of Kuwait's membership and was somewhat embarrassed to be caught between Egypt and Iraq on this question."<sup>41</sup> The Americans asked for this information to be kept confidential and not passed on to the Kuwaitis. The advice from the Foreign Office was therefore that Kuwait should be encouraged to keep up its bid for membership. Characteristically Gromyko, in a discussion with the UAR Foreign Minister, said that Soviet policy had not changed and that they would continue to block the application of Kuwait to the UN. Tactical considerations in the United Nations as well as the fact that the Arab nation was split over many issues, including the Yemen, meant that a concerted campaign in the UN on behalf of Kuwait could not be mounted. The decision taken at this point was to wait for a later date before reapplying.

Later in October 1962 Sheikh Abdullah wrote a letter to Khrushchev outlining the independence of Kuwait and its development of democratic institutions. He called

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<sup>37</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162896: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 20, 1962: Errock to Given.

<sup>38</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162896: Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 28, 1962: Richmond.

<sup>39</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162896: Moscow to Foreign Office, September 12, 1962: Smith to Walmsley.

<sup>40</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162896: Kuwait to Foreign Office, October 3, 1962: Richmond.

<sup>41</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162896: Foreign Office to Kuwait, October 4, 1962.

on Khrushchev to reconsider Soviet policy on Kuwait especially now that all the Arab States except one (Iraq), and seventy other states of the United Nations had extended recognition to Kuwait.<sup>42</sup> Despite this move, the Soviet Union in the short term continued its stance towards Kuwait.

Although Sheikh Abdullah believed by August 1962 that the potential for an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had considerably diminished, he was quick to voice his appreciation and stress the importance that he attached to the relationship of Kuwait with Britain. He credited the success of his Arab policies to the backbone of support that he could rely on from Britain.<sup>43</sup>

### **6.5 Patron-client relations: Britain and Kuwait.**

The position of Britain in the Gulf and its relationship with Kuwait had developed and changed considerably in the five years since the revolution in Iraq in 1958. Although a few lingering traces of British imperialism remained in the Gulf, the attitudes of policy makers in London was that British interests were with independent sovereign states in the region and not semi-colonial quasi-states. Despite this viewpoint, the British were still seen by many people in the Gulf as a quasi-colonial power with special political interests in the region, as indeed they still were. This attitude, so generally held by the Middle East states, would be difficult to dispel or change. Even though Britain was pursuing a policy of non-intervention in inter-Arab disputes it was still seen as pro-monarchist and anti-republican. The existence of Israel was a constant reminder to the Arabs of British imperialism. It was also one of the main dangers to the general Middle East position of Britain. In a report on Middle East policy in 1963 it was stated that:

**It may seem unfair that the onus of responsibility for Israel should fall so heavily on us. . . . Israel is in a sense a lasting proof of the continuity of British imperialism. The Balfour Declaration, the fact that Palestine was under British administration and even the Tripartite Declaration all point ominously in our**

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<sup>42</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162896: Kuwait to Foreign Office, November 1, 1962: Richmond.

<sup>43</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162893, "Kuwait to Foreign Office, August 27, 1962: Richmond to Walmsley.

**direction. To some extent feeling on this subject have run so high for so long that they are today in normal circumstances atrophied. . . . The one thing more than any other within the limits of probability which would destroy any hope of a nice cosy long term political relationship with the Arab States and bring us back starkly to political realities would be if, as a result of some collapse in Jordan, Israel went into the West Bank and we acquiesced in it without vigorous protest.<sup>44</sup>**

The independence of Kuwait at the beginning of 1962 was supported politically by the Arab League and militarily by the British government. Both pillars were vital to the continued independence of Kuwait, but the ultimate guarantee of the independence of Kuwait remained British forces stationed in Bahrain, Aden and Cyprus. Yet, Kuwait could not rely exclusively on military support from Britain for its independence because this would require the stationing of a large number of British troops in the state to be effective and guaranteed. Such an outcome would have made a mockery of its independence. Conversely, Kuwait could not rely solely upon the Arab League for its security. Although the Arab League Defence Force was the nominal force in Kuwait, its importance was political and symbolic rather than military. The unstable position of many states in the Middle East also made alliances unreliable and unpredictable.

The British government continued to support the security policy of Sheikh Abdullah. The Foreign Office was also realistic about the varying diplomatic stance that the Kuwaiti government had to take at different times and with different audiences. Richmond wrote:

**The Schizophrenia of Kuwait opinion on the two props of their independence and their tendency to trim their views to suit their audience have received striking illustration during the Christmas flurry over the Iraqi threat to Kuwait. In Kuwait, Brigadier Mubarak talked to the Commander of the British Liaison team of his intention to fire on the Arab League Security Force if they withdrew in the face of an Iraqi attack, and the Amir told me of trust in God and the British. In Cairo, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister expressed his confidence in the Ability of the Arab League Security Force to defend Kuwait's independence, and the Kuwaiti Ambassador denied his country's intention to seek British assistance.<sup>45</sup>**

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<sup>44</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 170165: Report on Middle East policy, March 12, 1963.

<sup>45</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 162893: Kuwait to Foreign Office, January 11, 1962: Richmond.

The courting, by Kuwait, of widespread Arab support for its continued independence was actively endorsed by the British government. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development was a device to try and engender this Arab political support. This could only be achieved if British military support was kept very much in the background. The scare over another possible Iraqi invasion in late December 1961 and the subsequent military preparations of the British forces in the region continued to undermine the credibility of the Kuwaiti government as a secure independent state. The support of the majority of the Arab States for the independence of Kuwait was not a straightforward matter and therefore the Kuwaitis had to be sensitive to Arab opinion.

#### **6.6 Short summary of events up until 1971**

On October 4, 1963 recognition had been given to the independence of Kuwait by Iraq and to the boundary delimitation introduced by the 1932 exchange of letters. This recognition by Iraq reduced the threat environment for Kuwait and allowed for further **Regulation** of the British-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. The British were becoming just one of many foreign governments that the Kuwait government would consult with. The document signed between the two states was made public.

**(1) The Republic of Iraq recognized the independence and complete sovereignty of the state of Kuwait and its boundaries as specified in the letter of the Prime Minister of Iraq dated 21.07.1932 and which was accepted by the ruler of Kuwait in his letter dated 10.08.1932**

**(2) The two Governments shall work towards reinforcing the fraternal relations subsisting between the two sister countries, inspired by their national duty, common interest and aspiration to a complete Arab Unity.**

**(3) The two Governments shall work towards establishing cultural, commercial and economic co-operation between the two countries and the exchange of technical information.**

**In order to realize all the foregoing objectives, they shall immediately establish diplomatic relations between them at the level of ambassadors.<sup>46</sup>**

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<sup>46</sup> Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq, pp. 110-111.

In the introductory paragraph of the 'Agreed Minutes' the Kuwaiti government agreed to "work for the termination ... of the Agreement concluded with the United Kingdom (19/06/1961)."<sup>47</sup> This was an important concession by the Kuwaiti government to Iraq and gave notice to the British-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. On January 10, 1964, the Kuwaiti government registered the agreement with the United Nations.

Renewed attempts were made by the Kuwaiti government in the mid 1960s to fully demarcate the border with Iraq, following the success of the demarcation of the Neutral Zone on July 7, 1965, with Saudi Arabia. Sheikh Abdullah visited Baghdad to discuss the coastal strip south of Umm Qasr and the islands of Warba and Bubiyan. He suggested a possible Joint Boundary Committee with the task of demarcating the border. Sheikh Abdullah, who had played such a crucial and vital role in the development of Kuwait as a nation and a state, fell ill and died in November 1965. He was succeeded by Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah al-Salim al-Sabah on November 24, 1965. The new ruler nominated Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad as Crown Prince and prime minister, and worked closely with him and his own son, Sheikh Saad Abdullah al-Salam. These three men along with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, became a strong cohesive unit in the implementation of strong rule.<sup>48</sup> Sheikh Sabah continued in the policy of his late half brother Sheikh Abdullah over demarcation of the border. A Joint Boundary Commission was duly set-up. However little progress was made because although it seemed that Kuwait was prepared to be flexible over the leasing of Warba this did not go far enough for Iraq. The Iraqi government still demanded the control of land south of Umm Qasr and the use of both Bubiyan and Warba. The Commission was eventually disbanded when it was clear that the two sides had reached an insurmountable impasse.

The British government was no longer in a position to influence or exert pressure on Iraq and therefore could not contribute much to the border issues. The

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<sup>47</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, p. 111.

<sup>48</sup> Marwan Iskandar, *The Cloud Over Kuwait* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), pp. 38-39.

Kuwaiti government was now having to reach a resolution of the border issues with little help from any patron. What remained from the patron was the guarantee of assistance if requested by the client. The removal of this guarantee would be the end of the relationship.

British policy for the Gulf in the late 1960s was mishandled by the Wilson government. In 1966 when notice was given of British troop withdrawal from Aden, announcement was made that forces stationed in the Gulf would be increased. Policy was to retain British bases indefinitely and to strengthen the garrisons.<sup>49</sup> Correspondingly, in November 1967 the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Goronwy Roberts, was despatched to reassure the rulers of the Gulf states that Britain was not contemplating withdrawal from the region. Roberts publicly and privately assured the rulers that Britain would stay in the Gulf as long as its presence was needed to keep peace and stability.

While British support was being reiterated in the upper Gulf, the last British troops were taken out of the Aden Colony on November 29, 1967. Aden had become a heavy burden on the British government. Since 1964 the bulk of British troops had been deployed in the Radfan mountains suppressing an insurrection. Rather than bolstering British security interests in the area (which the Aden base had been very much designed to do) the military presence in Aden had undermined British influence and strength in the Gulf. The lesson of Aden unfortunately influenced British policy towards the rest of the Gulf.

A further financial crisis in Britain prompted a reversal of the policy outlined by Roberts. In a bid to cut expenditure the decision was taken to retreat East of Suez. The savings in the Gulf came to £12 million per year. Compared to the value of British oil investments and profits made in the Gulf region this was a paltry sum. Kelly rightly condemns the Wilson Cabinet over this decision.

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<sup>49</sup> Maclean, British Foreign Policy, p. 183.



Here, it is clear, was no searching and far-reaching analysis of British foreign, imperial and defence policies, with all their grave implications and perilous imponderables, but an unseemly squabble among ministries of the Crown for private advantage, factional ascendancy and ideological or financial priority. Every consideration, it would seem, was subordinated to the narrow interests of party and doctrine...<sup>50</sup>

Roberts was sent to make the announcement of British withdrawal set for the end of 1971. It caused differing reactions throughout the world. In the United States the decision was cause for concern in the Senate and the State Department. The fear was that the British withdrawal would cause a power vacuum that would unsettle the balance of power in the region.<sup>51</sup> It was also felt that the United States did not have the men or resources to fill this vacuum with so much of the American military machine tied down in South East Asia.

In May 1968 in response to the British announcement of its intention to leave the Gulf the Kuwaiti government gave notice of the termination of the Exchange of Letters of June 19, 1961. An exchange of notes was made on May 13, 1968, between the Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and the British Ambassador to Kuwait. Two months later on July 30, 1968 a coup d'état in Baghdad reinstated Ba'thist rule. Over the next few months relations between Iraq and Iran began to deteriorate as both states attempted to reposition themselves in the Gulf following the announcement of British withdrawal. The threat of war with Iran prompted the new Ba'thist government in Baghdad to request the Kuwaiti government to allow Iraqi forces to be deployed in and around Umm Qasr. The Kuwaiti Minister of Defence and the interior tacitly acquiesced to what was in effect a fait accompli.<sup>52</sup> That he had no option but to do so was clear proof if any were needed of the almost total eclipse of British power.

The Kuwaiti government's response to British withdrawal was to try and substitute the United States for Britain as its guarantor of independence against Iraq. Sheikh Sabah met President-elect Nixon a month before his inauguration on December

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<sup>50</sup> J. B. Kelly, Arabia, the Gulf and the West (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 51.

<sup>51</sup> James Noyes, The Clouded Lens, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq, p. 114.

17, 1968. Henry Kissenger, then Nixon's nominee as National Security adviser wrote that:

**I assumed that the Arab-Israeli conflict would be at the forefront of the Amir's concern and prepared an erudite memorandum on the subject. Unfortunately, the Amir wanted, above all, to learn what plans the new Administration had for the Persian Gulf after the United Kingdom vacated the area, as it had announced it would do in 1971. What were America's intentions if, for example, Iraq attacked Kuwait? . . . [Nixon] replied that he would have to study the matter, but that, of course, we were interested in the territorial integrity of all states in the area; what tactical measures we would adopt would of course depend on circumstances. The Amir seemed content with this delphic utterance.<sup>53</sup>**

Kuwait now as a member of the United Nations and the Arab League had a certain amount of support from the international community and from International Organisations for its continued independence. The Kuwaiti government began to use its huge wealth to foster and guard this position. Rentier politics was to be the Kuwaiti government's replacement for international clientelism. This consisted of using large funds to buy support from neighbours in the Gulf and the Levant region. Low interest loans were made to most of the non-oil producing Arab states of the region by Kuwait.

The election in Britain in 1970 brought in the new Conservative Heath government. Heath explored the possibility of reversing the Labour governments decision to withdraw from the area. He sent Sir William Luce to the Gulf to report back on whether such a reversal could be possible. He recommended that it was not. This was accepted and Luce was appointed to negotiate the end of treaties by the end of 1971. The British-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship had lasted from 1899 to 1971. The withdrawal of British forces from East of Suez brought the end to this long standing relationship. Kuwait's security had been reliant on the 'borrowing of power' from outside the region, through its clientelist relationship with Britain. This relationship had now come to a close and the Kuwaiti government now had to look towards a myriad of international organisations and bilateral state relations to cement

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Kissenger, White House Years (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1979), p. 51.

its weak power position. The period 1964-1971 witnessed the withdrawal of Britain from the Gulf and the end of the British-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship. With this withdrawal came an end to an era of tranquillity and relative security for the Gulf.

The other Gulf states that were given notice of the end of their treaty relationships with Britain - Bahrain, Qatar and the emirates of the Trucial Coast - were less enthusiastic than Kuwait to leave British protection for full independence. Many outstanding issues with their larger neighbours had yet to be resolved. The most important of these between Bahrain and Iran was solved in 1969 when the Shah agreed to allow the sovereignty of Bahrain to be decided by a referendum of the population. Held under the auspices of the UN the people opted for independence. Qatar followed suit and also opted for independence.

The seven Sheikhdoms of the Trucial Coast on the prompting of the British government joined together to form the federation of the United Arab Emirates. This was made possible after a compromise was reached between Sharjah and Iran over the islands of Abu Musa, which was effectively partitioned. The Buraimi dispute between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, despite the efforts of Sir William Luce, was not resolved at this time. However, agreement was reached a few years later on August 21, 1974, on this issue. The oil wealth of Abu Dhabi provided enough of an incentive to the other less wealthy Trucial States to overcome their minor differences. Sheikh Zaid became President of the Federation which was formally inaugurated on December 2, 1971.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

By the beginning of the 1970s Kuwait had developed into a city state. The money derived from oil had allowed the al-Sabah ruling family to create a new Kuwait. The long standing Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship was now at an end. The Kuwaiti government now sought safety in a multitude of relations developed from

becoming fully integrated into international society, by way of the United Nations and through the exchange of Embassies and Ambassadors. The reduction in Kuwait's threat environment due to the partial recognition of Kuwait by Iraq, its membership of various international organisations including the United Nations and membership of the Arab League, allowed the Kuwaiti government to take this course.

## **Chapter 7: Final Perspectives**

### **7.1 The British perspective**

The anachronistic British position in the Gulf was a left over of an 'imperial age' when as one of its Indian civil servants put it the "Gulf states were a special preserve of HMG whose policy towards them rested on a kind of Monroe Doctrine."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Anglo-Kuwaiti relations between 1957 and 1963 provide the material for not only an excellent case study of patron-client relations in flux, but also a study of part of the end of Britain's imperial legacy.

The declining power position of Britain in the Gulf in the later 1950s and 1960s also demonstrates the main argument of the thesis, that declining patrons seek economic objectives from their clients as distinct from strategic advantage, ideological alignment or alliance support. Paul Kennedy argues that a great power can fall and decline because of military over-extension.<sup>2</sup> In such circumstances commitments outstrip resources. In the case of Britain a major challenge of the last years of Empire was how to match commitments to resources while also using its remaining influence over colonial, post-colonial and client states to prop up a weak financial position. The changing realities of Britain's power position produced a need to redefine and change attitudes and policies. This need was readily apparent in British policy in the Gulf.

British policy was dominated by four major characteristics. First came an inherent imperial attitude of the Foreign Office towards the region; second, the dominance of short term ad-hoc solutions over long-term planning, which remained

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<sup>1</sup> PRO: FO 371/ 19977: Rendel's record of conversation with Persian Ambassador.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy, Rise and Fall.

weak and vague. The third characteristic was the formal and legal nature of the relationships built up in the region by way of patron-client relationships. Fourth came the tendency of policy to be reactive rather than proactive.

Political power in the long term comes from a strong economic base. Governments with weak economic and financial circumstances may therefore attempt to improve their economic standing through their relations with other states. There is a rich secondary literature on British colonial and imperial decline, one of the most influential voices being that of John Gallagher.<sup>3</sup> He contends that both domestic and international pressures should be joined together to understand the pressures on British relations to change its colonial system. Gallagher also argues that the Second World War had led to a revival of Britain's system of formal rule and that the trend which had been seen during the inter-war period, of formal rule giving way to mere influence, had been temporarily reversed. Britain's relations with Kuwait confirm this analysis. The British government had attempted to strengthen its position in, and its control of, the Sheikdom throughout the 1950s. This was attempted by trying to dominate Kuwait formally through the Embassy and informally through KOC and other British companies. The Suez fiasco and the Iraqi revolution brought ruin to this position and the relationship moved back to its traditional role of influence and military support 'over the horizon'.

The loss of imperial will that Gallagher also mentions is certainly relevant to British relations with Kuwait.

**Was it really worth the country's while to maintain a world system at all? What was the need of this world? If there was not to be a British presence east of Suez, then there was precious little point in holding bastions and staging posts,**

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<sup>3</sup> John Gallagher, The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire, the Ford Lectures and other Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

whether in the Mediterranean and the Middle East or in the Indian Ocean. If there was no necessity for imperialism then there was no reason for holding the vestiges of empire. This is not so much an end game as a refusal to play the game any longer.<sup>4</sup>

The pressing financial problems for the British government ensured that any new overseas policies would be dominated by the need for economy. The reduction in British power also ensured that the British government actively sought diplomatic support for any of its actions. The objective remained the preservation of the British position, politically, strategically and economically in the region. But, cosmetic changes in relations with the Sheikdoms did not change the substance of British policy in the region, and could only disguise Britain's weakened position. During periods of tension and crisis the British government reverted where appropriate and possible to military intervention. Problematically, there remained considerable problems with the use of the military option in the Gulf. One of the underlying themes that runs throughout the thesis was that within British defence strategy in the Gulf, the problems of the air barrier and the strategic projection of force hampered and shaped policy.<sup>5</sup> For example British policy in Oman was strongly influenced by the need to have RAF bases at Masirah and overflight rights.<sup>6</sup>

There had been a failure to devise any long term British strategy for the Gulf. What remained in this period was a rather ad hoc oscillation between immediate urgent requirements and wider British policy concerns. The result of this rather vague and fluid approach was the impression of anachronistic drift. That Britain was able to retain its position in the Gulf for so long despite this lack of a coherent long term strategy

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<sup>4</sup> Gallagher, *The Decline*, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> See pp. 113-114 of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Timpe, "British Foreign Policy", p. 319.

was due to the reciprocal relationships that it enjoyed with many of the Sheikhdoms in the Gulf and the grudging acceptance of the larger Gulf powers that Britain was preferred as a balancer than another either external power or an internal regional power rival. Credit must also be given to the attachment of the British policy elites to the idea of Britain retaining a role in the region and to the support extended to the Macmillan government by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. In retrospect it was clear that Britain's position in the Gulf after Suez was in a slow move towards terminal decline.

The Suez disaster accelerated many long term changes to British policy in the Middle East. In the short term the reaction in Whitehall to the crisis was to 'batten down the hatches'. The reason for this was the inability of the policy elites to adapt either politically or psychologically to the new realities. The revolution in Iraq in 1958 had more of an effect on British policy and relations in the Gulf, than the events of Suez.<sup>7</sup>

British representation in the Gulf was made up of personnel from the old India Office, the Sudan Political Service and the Foreign Office. Each had different traditions and training. This, combined with the institutional problems in Britain's policy-making bodies, which included the number of different agencies with an interest in overseas policy, meant that the Foreign Office was unable to devise a coherent long term policy.<sup>8</sup> Despite their conservatism towards policy in the Gulf the Foreign Office could act very pragmatically. This was due much to the influential personality of Sir William Luce and his important tenure as Political Resident in the Gulf and Governor of Aden during the final throes of Britain's presence there. There were clearly some talented

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<sup>7</sup> Timpe, "British Foreign Policy", p. 321.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 12 of this thesis.



British personnel in the region at this time, but their influence on policy had been changed by developments of communications which had made their role, as Balfour-Paul put it, that of articulate postman.<sup>9</sup>The changed international environment also ensured that policy problems could not be compartmentalised but had to be seen as a whole. In essence their role was one of implementation rather than devising policy.

The Prime Minister was also a strong supporter of the continued British policy in the Gulf and towards Kuwait, but this was due to the economic importance of the Gulf to Britain, and not because of any commitment to the old imperial role. Macmillan wanted Britain to retain a strong international position, but he was aware that financial constraints on the British economy would limit the extent of this stand.<sup>10</sup>The temporary maintenance of this international position owed a great deal to the 'Special Relationship' with the United States, and one of the underlying themes throughout this thesis is the importance of this relationship to the success of Britain's Gulf policy. John Darwin writes that "the recognition of the necessity of progressing towards colonial self government coexisted with an equal determination to preserve British world power."<sup>11</sup>

Macmillan was insistent that British foreign policy should also be seen as progressive and modern. In February 1960 in a speech to the South African Parliament, in Cape Town, Macmillan spoke of "the winds of change . . . blowing through this continent."<sup>12</sup>This speech publicised the new position of the Cabinet on the

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<sup>9</sup> Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire*, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> See p. 13 of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire, the Historical Debate* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991), p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> P. J. Madgewick, D Steeds and L. J. Williams, *Britain Since 1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1982) p. 286.

Empire and Britain's colonial role.<sup>13</sup> It was now clear that, as Keith Middlemas writes: "Evolution of a modern colonial policy in which independence became not a remote destiny but an immediate virtue."<sup>14</sup> There was no single reason either for this decision or for the general break-up of the British imperial system which followed from it. There was rather a myriad of reasons that included Britain's economic weakness, world opinion and domestic re-election concerns. Britain's position in the Gulf did not really reflect the rate of change in the other parts of Britain's imperial network. This was for three important reasons. First, the massive importance of Gulf oil and financial profits of the British oil companies to Britain. Second, that the position that Britain had in the Gulf in the late 1950s was one that the British government was attempting to achieve for its general imperial commitments. Third, the need for secure and plentiful oil for Western Europe was not just an economic but a strategic necessity. Massive amounts would have been needed for a tank and air campaign against the Warsaw pact.

The new British policy was an attempt to remove the burdens of imperialism (increasing diplomatic, political and economic cost) without losing the influence built-up over many years. In essence this was imperialism on the cheap. The relationship that Britain had with many of the Gulf states was a sort of model for this. Britain had hegemonic influence over much of the external policy and behaviour of the Sheikdoms, but without having the difficulties of having to rule them domestically. This policy failed because the financial weakness of Britain undermined its power. There was also perhaps a subconscious decision taken by many of the policy makers in London that a world system for Britain was no longer worth the cost.

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<sup>13</sup> R.F Holland, European Decolonization 1918-1981, An Introductory Survey (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p. 227.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Middlemas, Power, Competition and the State: Volume 1: Britain in Search of Balance, 1940-1961 (California: Hoover Institution Press, 1986) p.285.

The British expected to remain the predominant external influence in many of their former colonies and preserve the special international status that imperial power had brought them in the past. That it was not possible to have their cake and eat it, to give up imperial burdens but still enjoy imperial perks, came as an unwelcome surprise.<sup>15</sup>

Significantly, the Wilson government's final decision to withdraw from East of Suez in 1968 was prompted by a run on the pound rather than political or strategic considerations.

The changing Anglo-Kuwaiti relations in this period were a microcosm of wider British relations with its crumbling colonial and imperial empire. The Macmillan government had correctly realised that the health of the British economy now lay with a closer attachment to Europe rather than to the old colonial system. Both as Chancellor and as Prime Minister, Macmillan had sought financial cuts from the colonial system. He had introduced a cost-benefit review of the colonial position early on in his premiership.<sup>16</sup> The considerable savings made to government overseas expenditure had come through cuts in military expenditure and the retreat from empire. The weakness of the country's economic position and the pressure on sterling had accelerated this process.<sup>17</sup> The imperial game was up, and by the start of the 1960s the question was not whether but rather how and when British withdrawal should take place.

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<sup>15</sup> Darwin, *The End of the British Empire*, p. 114.

<sup>16</sup> Balfour-Paul, *The end of Empire*, p. 138.

<sup>17</sup> Maurice W. Kirby, *The Decline of British Economic Power Since 1970* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981) p. 118; Susan Strange, *Sterling and British Policy: A Political Study of an International Currency in Decline* (London: Oxford University Press for RIIA, 1971).

## **7.2 The Kuwaiti perspective**

Kuwaiti insecurity is derived from its internal weakness and its external vulnerability. As a small, very rich, but politically and military weak state, Kuwait is fully exposed to the general problems of the anarchic international system. The problems of geography also define Kuwaiti security problems. Proximity to Iraq, a powerful regional neighbour, has been the crux of Kuwait's external security concerns for much of the last forty years. The desire for survival led the al-Sabah ruling family to develop a client-patron relationship with Britain. This mutually beneficial relationship facilitated the survival not only of the state but of the regime. Clientelism allowed the al-Sabah family to balance its inherent problem of internal autonomy and external security delicately. The fundamental objective of Sheikh Abdullah was security. Kuwait's national security was indivisible from regime (or the ruling al-Sabah family's) security. Security was perceived in both the political and military contexts, and therefore there remained an inherent tension in the client bond, because it provided military security but political insecurity.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship changed in the later 1950s and early 1960s to a position in which Kuwait was ready to replace clientelism with rentier politics and oil-dollar diplomacy. This new policy was shown by the events of August 1990 to be unable to guarantee the security of Kuwait. Since the Second Gulf War there has been a move back by both Kuwaiti and the other member of the GCC towards stronger bilateral relations with Western powers. These new bonds have similarities with clientelism. But, the new security of these states by contrast with the clientelist relationships enjoyed with Britain from the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of the 1960s, had been supported and nuanced by membership of a myriad of

political and security organisations including the GCC, the Arab League and the United Nations. The Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client relationship safeguarded Kuwait during the security crisis of 1961. Such a relationship in 1990 might have deterred or repulsed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

The 1961 crisis although having many structural similarities to the crisis of 1990 also had differences. In the wider context of the Middle East the Kuwaiti crisis of 1961 was also de-stabilised by the thrust of pan-Arabism and the tensions of the Arab cold war. In the Nasser era Arab interstate relations were shaped by border disputes between a number of the Arab states. Iraq's claims to Kuwait were part of a pattern of border and territorial disputes in this period which included, the Saudi Arabia and Oman civil war in the 1950s, Syrian and Egyptian policy towards Jordan in the 1950s, Syrian involvement in Lebanon in 1958, Egyptian interference in Iraq in 1959, the Moroccan-Algerian conflict of 1965, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia's intervention in the Yemeni civil war from 1962 to 1967. The weakness of Arab co-operation and the lack of a regional institution for the resolution of conflicts was amply demonstrated in the Iraqi-Kuwaiti case. The Arab League could only offer a token force in the defence of Kuwait, its importance being more political than military. It had clearly failed to resolve a crisis between two of its members.

Iraq's bid for Kuwait was part of the Qassim regime's desire for hegemony in the Gulf. It was predictable that Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt would seek to oppose such a move. As Ibrahim writes: "When Abdul-Karim Qassim advanced the Iraqi claim to Kuwait, even Egyptian President Gamal Abdul-Nasser, the symbol of Arab nationalism, had sided with the British in defence of Kuwait."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibrahim, The Gulf Crisis, pp. 15-16.

### **7.3 Theory**

Throughout this dissertation relations between Kuwait and Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s have been characterised as a client-patron relationship. The dyadic asymmetrical bond between the two states underwent fundamental changes in this period that the clientelistic model can help to explain in a much more specific way than the more general structural realist or neoliberal institutionalist approaches of recent years.<sup>19</sup> The client-patron model also acts as a theoretical framework for specific and general themes that dominated and shaped the relationship. The most important of these was the structural insecurity of the small weak client, Kuwait, and the declining power of the patron, Britain. These two themes shaped the relationship, but the dynamics and tensions of the international system must be added to create a coherent picture of the clientelistic bond.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship was useful as a case study for this model because it highlighted the various changing aspects possible in such a dyadic patron-client relationship. According to international patron-client theory the reciprocal exchange of resources between the patron and the client takes the form of the patron giving security and or economic largesse to the client in return for some combination of ideological alignment, strategic advantage and alliance support.<sup>20</sup> In the Anglo-Kuwaiti case during the period 1899-1945 this was certainly true, with Britain making economic and security transfers to Kuwait and the al-Sabah ruling family giving their patron strategic advantage and alliance support in return. This case study also points to some unique features that differentiate it from many other patron-client relationships.

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<sup>19</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Jr., Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge (New York: St.Martin's, 1995) provides a survey of their rival schools that is both recent and comprehensive.

<sup>20</sup> See pp. 17-25 of this thesis.

These included the financial wealth of the client and therefore its economic independence of the patron, and the level of secrecy inherent in the relationship even during crisis periods

In the post-war period, and especially after the crisis in Iran between 1951-1953, the exchange of resources changed as the client began to give the patron economic largesse in the form of cheap oil and sterling investments in return for the continued guarantee of military security. The Anglo-Kuwaiti patron-client bond entered its most vital stage during the later 1950s and early 1960s, when the relationship dominated and shaped Britain's Gulf policy. Oil and the sterling investments of the Gulf rulers also helped shape British policy in this region, as did the growth of Arab nationalism and the intrinsic tensions in the Arab world between modernism and traditionalism. Oil imports into Britain came predominantly from this area, with an average of fifty percent coming from Kuwait and eighty to ninety percent from the Gulf as a whole. This thesis contends that Kuwait became the most important bilateral relationship for Britain in the region following the Suez debacle in 1956 and the revolution in Iraq in 1958.

The increasing importance of the client to the patron ensured that this relationship became more balanced and less asymmetrical as Kuwait's wealth increased. Accordingly, and in line with the model of patron-client relations, the relationship went through a period of adjustment and eventual decline or regulation as both the patron and the client respectively became, unable to carry out and no longer in need of the bond. Shoemaker and Spanier contend, and this is borne out in the Anglo-Kuwaiti

case, that the more the patron values the dyadic bond the weaker the patronal control of that bond becomes.<sup>21</sup>

Patron-client relations existed between Britain and Kuwait between 1899 and 1971. The period 1957-1963 witnessed the sea change that took place in the relationship. This time frame is also important because it demonstrated the various different degrees of possible change in a patron-client relationship, with **Regulation**, **Maintenance**, **Accommodation** and **Reinforcement** of the bond all being experienced at different moments.<sup>22</sup> With the end of clientelism, Kuwait sought to replace the British security relationship with a form of rentier politics financed by its huge oil wealth, under the umbrella of a myriad of security relations with the Arab League, the United Nations and eventually the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Kuwait managed to play this survival game for nearly twenty years after the British withdrawal from the Gulf. Catastrophically, the invasion of Iraqi troops on August 2, 1990, demonstrated the failure of this security policy. The Kuwaiti government then began a reversion back to an old style client-patron relationship with a coalition of the West under the leadership of the United States. The security guarantees offered by the United States and to a lesser extent Britain, backed up by parts of the Arab League, in many ways were a re-run of the guarantees of the 1950s and 1960s and especially of 1961. The major difference was the reversal of the United States and Britain in importance in the security relationship with Kuwait. In 1961 the guarantee was overwhelmingly that of Britain but politically supported by the United States (the Kennedy administration also offered military support to the British in its operation in 1961). In the Second Gulf War of 1990-1991 the United States was the major player

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<sup>21</sup> Shoemaker and Spanier, *Patron-Client*, Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> See p. 25 of this thesis.



but with important political and military support from Britain. During periods when Kuwait's threat environment increased the patron-client relationship strengthened and drew closer. This was characterised by **Accommodation** or **Reinforcement** of the relationship. During periods when the external threat receded the patron-client relationship was characterised instead by **Regulation** and **Maintenance**.

The threat environment for Kuwait was dominated by the danger of annexation, first by Saudi Arabia, and later by Iraq. This insecurity dominated and crafted the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. The general view of the problems for Kuwait with Iraq and Saudi Arabia could be viewed at from two different perspectives. The first perspective was that this was just one of the many parts of the Arab disunity problem. As Sir William Luce elegantly wrote: "It is the tragedy of the Arab world that, in spite of all the effort and talk of the past 20 years, Arab Unity is not only as far away as ever but the Arabs are more deeply divided today than at any time since their liberation from Turkish rule."<sup>23</sup> The second perspective was that this confrontation was a function of both the growth in number and the disparity in power of states in the twentieth-century international system.

The foreign policy strategies of weak powers are shaped by their desire to break out of the constraints of the region and 'borrow power' from beyond the immediate regional security complex. The relative position of a weak power may then be improved. Yet despite the 'borrowed power' - which in any case may be matched by that of other external patrons - weak power is still bound by the structures of the regional system. This has clearly been true for Kuwait, and the problems of the

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<sup>23</sup> Luce, "Britain in the Persian Gulf", p. 277.

regional sub-system continue to dominate Kuwaiti policy in the 1990s just as they did in the 1950s and 1960s.

It is important for the understanding of the patron-client model that it is viewed in the context of the wider regional or global power structures. Cantori and Spiegel convincingly argue that: "The Arab subsystem is itself intrinsically a part of, and reliant upon, a more dominant international system."<sup>24</sup> Links with the broader strategic environment provide a greater understanding of the dynamics within the patron-client bond. For example, it is contended by Shoemaker and Spanier that:

**Smaller states, then gain a value to each superpower based not only upon their intrinsic worth but also upon their ability to confer a competitive advantage on one of the superpowers. These smaller states become scarce resources that are available to the highest superpower bidder. . . it is critical to view seemingly irrational and irresponsible superpower interest in and concessions to, a smaller state in the context of this superpower bilateral competition.<sup>25</sup>**

Why was Britain still playing these games in the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s? Compared, for instance, with Britain's retreat from its security commitments to Turkey and Greece in 1947, the end of its commitments in the Gulf took place at a very sedentary rate. This poses the question of why Britain was able to succeed in maintaining such a strong position in the Gulf for so long. The patron-client theory offers some insight to this, suggesting that the success was substantially due to the reciprocal strength of the long-established relationships between Britain and a number of client states in the Gulf, notably Kuwait. One is reminded of Schumpeter's complaint that Marxists, by concentrating on current material conditions and class

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<sup>24</sup> Louis J. Cantori and Steven L. Spiegel, The International Politics of Regions (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 187.

<sup>25</sup> Shoemaker and Spanier, Patron-Client, p. 13.

relations, missed the continuing power of atavistic elements in society such as aristocracies to sway the state.<sup>26</sup>

Another reason for the maintenance of Britain's position in the region was its success at playing the balance of power game. In the Gulf the broader strategic environment could be characterised as a balance of power system of Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. During its long period of dominance in the Gulf Britain acted as the natural balancer and external hegemonic power, keeping each of these states in check by pursuing a policy of supporting the smaller states in the area and in turn either bolstering or checking the three larger powers. Within this regional sub-system there is therefore another inherent tension between states aspiring for independence, which helped secure the success of the balancing process, and states seeking predominance or regional hegemony. This tension is observed to be part of the dynamics of regional state relations. "Most of the states in each region are concerned with balancing; several are perceived as seeking regional predominance."<sup>27</sup>

Another characteristic of this sub-region is the number of weak powers within it.<sup>28</sup> Weak powers are compelled to seek relationships with stronger powers in order to survive as independent actors. The diplomatic strategies employed characteristically have as their underlying aim the cultivation of external assistance.<sup>29</sup> Thus "regional states appeal to outside states and organisations for military, financial, and diplomatic support on the basis of ideology, strategic interests, and patron-client exchanges."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, Imperialism and Social Classes (Philadelphia: Orion, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Wriggins, Dynamics, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Cantori and Spiegel define a sub-system as "proximate and interacting states which have some common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, and historical bonds, and whose sense of identity is sometimes increased by actions and attitudes of states external to the system." Cantori and Spiegel, The International, pp. 186-187.

<sup>29</sup> See pp. 119-120 of this thesis.

<sup>30</sup> Terrence P. Lyons, "The Horn of Africa Regional Politics: A Hobbesian World", in Wriggins, Dynamics, p. 183.

Despite national sovereignty and independence states are often characterised by marked security interdependencies. This is especially true of weak powers. Students of International Relations have long been aware of this. It was a central feature of the postwar international order envisaged by E. H. Carr that, given current military technology and economic interdependence, weak powers would survive only as members of large multinational “groups of several formally sovereign states [in which] the effective (but not necessarily the nominal) authority is exercised from a single centre.”<sup>31</sup> The leaders of these states desire autonomy and independence but are in a constant struggle to match the two often competing aims. As Terrence Lyons clearly argues:

**To the region's hard-pressed states, these outside powers were a source of support - and threat. Patrons from far off provided the sinews of statehood, in some instance permitting governments to survive longer than they might otherwise. The more the regional states were internally fragile and surrounded by hostile neighbours, the easier it was for outsiders to become supporting patrons.**<sup>32</sup>

In the case of Kuwait, the client-patron relationship that it had with Britain was a cause of social and political stagnation within Kuwait but was also the vital component in its survival as a state. Military assistance to the client from the patron is usually a quid pro quo for either a strategic, political or diplomatic exchange from the client to the patron. This was partly the case with the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship, but with the distinction that the client reciprocated with almost exclusively economic goods to the patron.

The intervention of British troops into Kuwaiti in July 1961 highlighted a number of problems inherent within this military commitment. First, the British force

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<sup>31</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1946) p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> Lyons, “The Horn”, in Wriggins, *Dynamics*, p. 189.

had to appear credible and appropriate to the needs of the situation. This entailed a quick strong response to the deteriorating security environment. Second, the military response had to be compatible with and appropriate to the political and diplomatic environment experienced. The British security guarantee for Kuwait unfortunately was an ambiguous security because it both shored up and undermined the al-Sabah regime's legitimacy. Third, the formalised nature of the military commitment from Britain to Kuwait acted to increase the regional political differences. The very presence of British military forces enabled the Gulf Sheikhs to continue to ignore the regional political differences, and thus the withdrawal of the British in 1971 from the Gulf forced them to address the systemic problems of the region.

Analysis of the system structure also highlights problems for the states in the region. Systemic logic forms boundaries within which only a limited number of policy choices can be made by the state. The differences between the system constraints and the scope of policy choice provide an intrinsic tension for those devising foreign policy. These restrictions can act to produce policy norms that limit innovation. Often particular developments will produce predictable policy choices and responses.

**Typical situations of insecurity often evoke foreseeable policy responses; many actions produce likely if not always exactly predictable reactions. As Waltz argues, individual leaders may change, but the states their successors manage often react in much the same ways. There are consistent patterns that help one foresee the range of probable choices.<sup>33</sup>**

Members of regimes do not always act in accord with these systemic pressures. The perceptions, values and goals defined by them have a large bearing on policy choice. Problematically, domestic political constraints or pressures can lead to

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<sup>33</sup> W Howard Wriggins, "The Dynamics of Regional Politics: An Orientation", in Wriggins, Dynamics, p. 8.

decisions that do not fit in with the expected outcome as predicted from a structural model of behaviour. Governments can, and do, act unpredictably.

Four conclusions can be drawn from the Iraqi-Kuwait disputes of 1958 -1963 and 1990-1991 that fit into a number of general patterns of interstate conflict in the Gulf. First, there is an important relationship between the domestic and foreign policy positions of the states. As Robert Litwak writes:

**In any study of Third World security questions, it is accepted as almost axiomatic that the factors governing the activations of inter-state conflict are largely reflections of internal weaknesses. Indeed regimes are prone to utilize external threats as a means of distracting public attention from the more immediate problems of national integration and development.<sup>34</sup>**

The weakness of Kuwait has made it a potential target for Iraqi aggression while the internal financial and ethnic problems in Iraq had important bearings on its external policy.

Second, threats and disputes between states are shaped by the type and nature of the regimes in question. Revolutionary changes in government can filter through into important changes in external policy. This was clearly the case in Iraq in July 1958 which led to the eventual claims on Kuwait and in Iran between 1979 and 1980 which resulted in the First Gulf War between Iraq and Iran, and Iranian claims to Bahrain.

Third, stemming from the type of regimes, tension can be caused by the fundamental differences between regimes. Regimes of similar ideological and religious persuasion are more likely to be able to resolve their conflicts and disputes. The similarity of regimes in the lower Gulf (conservative monarchical tribal based Sheikhdoms) has been part of the reason for the limitation of conflict between them. The difference in power and outlook, goals and ideology of the Qassim and the al-

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<sup>34</sup> Chubin, Security in the Gulf, p. 96.

Sabah regimes was an important factor in their dispute. The difference between Nasserism and the Gulf Sheikhs outlook was also a potential threat that did not always materialise. Nasserist advocacy of republicanism, Arab nationalism, Arab socialism and non-alignment demanded a careful diplomatic response by the Sheikhdoms and Iran.<sup>35</sup>

Fourth, the Iraqi-Kuwait conflict also shows how inter-Arab disputes have developed from traditional sources of conflict over issues such as water, tribal grazing rights and smuggling to new sources of conflict over land, strategic territorial areas and continental shelf disputes (linked with the oil issue). From the formation of Iraq up until the revolution in 1958 the issues of tension between Iraq and Kuwait had been predominantly concerned with water, gun smuggling, the al-Sabah date farms and tribal jurisdiction. After the revolution in July 1958 tensions moved to the more contentious area of territorial dispute that had been a simmering problem between the two states since the time of King Ghazi's claims to Kuwait in 1939.

The changing pattern of Iraqi-Kuwaiti, Anglo-Kuwaiti and Anglo-Iraqi relations was also a function of the changing social and economic nature of the three states. The discovery of oil was both a boon and a burden to the Gulf Sheikhdoms. It increased their worth to external patrons but also to regional powers. The economic development deriving from the oil broke down the traditional social framework of tribal society. The need for large foreign labour in the Sheikhdoms combined with the breakdown of traditional society in these small states led to an increase in domestic insecurity.

Kuwait's problem has been that it is a weak power wishing to survive in a hostile regional environment. It had needed to borrow power from outside the system

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<sup>35</sup> Ghassemi, "United States-Iranian Relationships, 1953-1978", p. 270.

in order to survive. The states that it could most readily make a clientelistic bond have been the states of the West. Unfortunately, these relationships were seen as problematic because of the West's position on the Arab-Israeli question. The developing peace process between Israel and most of the Arab states will have important ramifications for future Kuwaiti security and the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute. To conclude, it is clear that as Terrence Lyons writes "complex, intertwined and enduring disputes are rooted firmly in the nature of the states in the region and their contradictory security needs and aspirations."<sup>36</sup>

Finally the patron-client theory, as with any theory, when applied to actual reality has many disparities. Although the international patron-client model is a useful tool, that is all it is. Policy decisions cannot be fed into a simple two dimensional matrix constituted by the variables of threat, economic well-being, and the level of political interaction. In the Anglo-Kuwaiti case the threat environment matrix (Table 1.3) worked well. Table 1.2 was not so successful in the Anglo-Kuwait case because of the inherent financial strength of the client (unusual in patron-client relationships). Although as the asymmetry between the patron and the client closed financially, the relationship did move towards policies characterised as **Regulation** and **Accommodation**. The main argument that declining patrons seek economic advantage from their clients also does not fit neatly with reality. That any state could pursue such a clear cut hierarchical objective without deviations to other policy considerations would be remarkable. In the case of Anglo-Kuwaiti relations, despite the objective importance of financial considerations, policy makers in London retained notions of power status and Cold War roles that continued to shape policy.

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<sup>36</sup> Lyons, "The Horn", in Wriggins, *Dynamics*, p. 197.



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